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# GREAT TEXTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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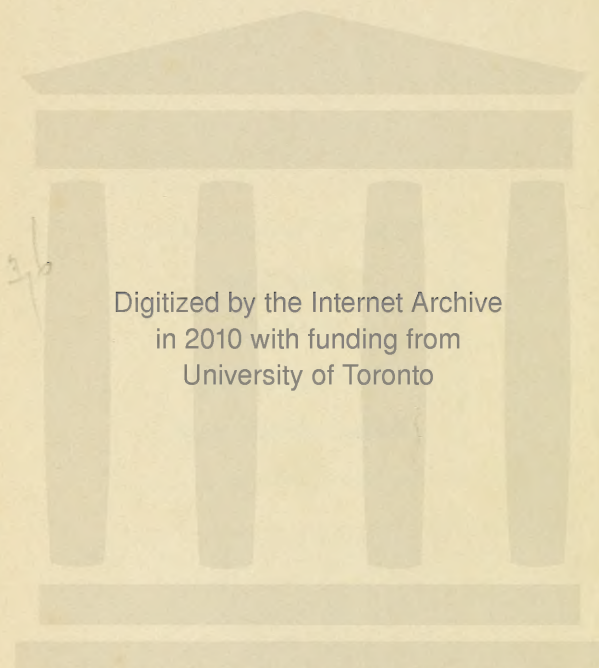
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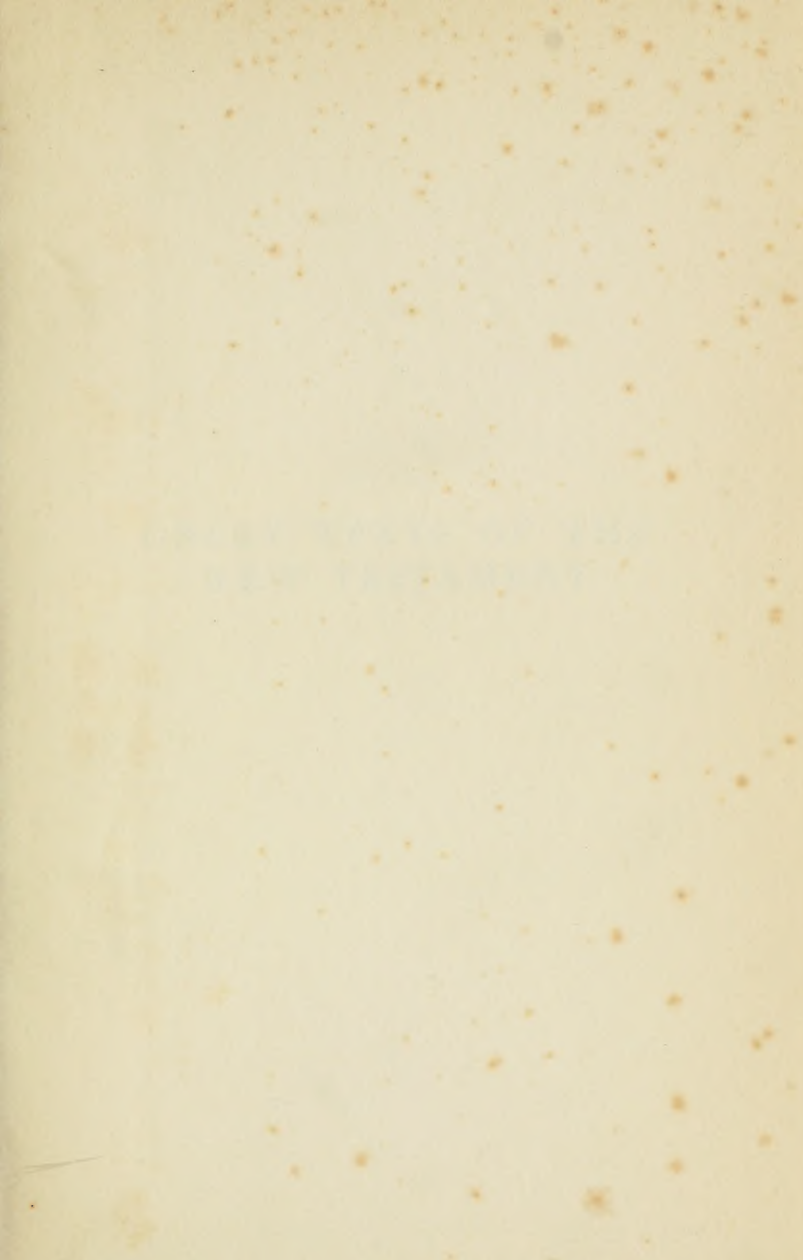
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GREAT TEXTS OF THE  
NEW TESTAMENT



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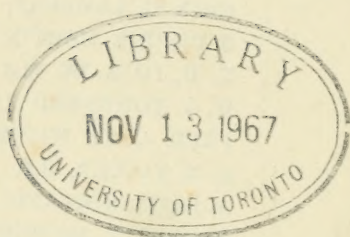
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THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

“For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”—I CORINTHIANS xiii. 12.

EVERY one knows that there was no glass in those days, and no mirrors of the kind we use. The mirror which was in Paul's mind was made of stone or brass, or perhaps horn, which was rubbed and polished and smoothed until one could see his own face reflected in it. But it was always a dim and distorted image rather than the real thing. That helps to show you the apostle's thought. And what he says here is only another proof of the close connection of wisdom and humility. The wisest man is always ready to take the lowest seat in God's school. The most richly illumined soul is always lamenting his blindness and crying out, “Lord, that mine eyes may be opened !” Paul was the greatest of the apostles, the greatest interpreter of Christian truth, after the Master. He was the cleverest and wisest of the men who shaped the Church. I should think that, with perhaps the exception of John, he knew more of God and the things of God, and the

mind of Christ, than any of the rest. He had been peculiarly enriched with visions and revelations, and had grasped with a master's hand things which we hardly dare touch. Yet here, with a modesty that is most lovely and becoming, he confesses that he is only a child in these things, with a child's thoughts and a child's understanding. He is just looking into the mystery of things as a child does, and wondering what it all means. He is asking riddles for which he can get no answer, and he is longing for the time when the riddles will be solved and the darkened eyes be opened in the full, clear light. "Now we see through a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

### I.

**That is the language which we all use, unless we are among the boastful and the foolish.**

The wise man never gets beyond that confession in this mortal life. He cannot. For the more he knows, the more he learns what he does not know; and every question for which he finds an answer suggests fifty other questions for which there is no answer forthcoming yet. In these days we are far more knowing in a hundred matters than Paul could be. Human intelligence has made great advances, won a thousand victories over crass ignorance and superstition, and wrested many a secret from the

begrudging hand of nature. We have cleared dense jungles, explored the darkness, made marvellous discoveries, accumulated vast stores of mental and moral wealth, and taught every schoolboy a thousand things which the apostles knew not. And yet all this has but shown us how much there is still to be won, how much remains unknowable, mocking our eager quest, and dumb to all our questionings.

There are secrets hidden in every tiny flower and grain of sand, in every throbbing nerve and aching heart, which our keenest wisdom cannot discover. Every tear is a profound mystery, every sigh is a world of unimaginable things. No one can tell us why we laugh or why we cry. No one can read his brother's mind or understand his own. He who has studied human nature most closely has but touched the surface of it. Those who can tell us most about man can only prove that he is fearfully and wonderfully made. Men who have been investigating for a lifetime the sins, sorrows, and diseases of the world, find that these are still the everlasting riddle; and he whose faith has given him the clearest vision of God, knows that these are but "a portion of His ways, and the thunders of His power none can understand." The highest philosophy still prattles and stammers and guesses like a child, and we all have to kneel down humbly declaring that our wisdom is but dim-eyed folly, and repeating these words of Paul: "Now we see through a glass, darkly: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known."

## II.

**Brethren, it is surely our very ignorance that helps to make us religious.**

We learn the way of prayer through the way of mystery, and we cling to God's leading hand because the way is dark and because we feel so blind. Perhaps if we knew more, we should trust and believe less. If our eyes were wide opened, there would be no room for faith; and if we could foresee the events of to-morrow and next week, we should be self-conceited enough to drop our daily prayer for guidance. It is the darkness that makes us kneel and humble ourselves, and hold hard on to Him who knows and foresees all things.

There are some people who tell us that as science gains ground it will push faith out. They tell us that religion is born of mystery and ignorance and superstition, and that when enlightenment spreads sufficiently there will be no religious fear and reverence left. Yes, when enlightenment spreads sufficiently, when science has made us all as wise as God, we shall be able to dispense with God: but when will that be? It is mere prating folly to talk about it. When science can clear up all mystery and solve all riddles, there will be no need of a Bible or a prayer-chamber. But that scientific millennium is a long way off. There will be always religious faith, and anxious praying, and thirst for the living God,

so long as to-morrow's uncertainties remain and the future is veiled from our eyes ; whilst tombs are so near, and sudden deaths so frequent ; whilst there are so many stricken hearts and so much weeping amid the laughter of men ; whilst every heart knoweth its own bitterness, and every thoughtful mind finds life and the world one big enigma. Until death and sorrow and fear are done away, there will always be the clinging in the darkness to the feet of the great, kind God.

We shall have to kill human emotion, before we can banish religion. We shall have to make men forgetful of their past and utterly heedless of their future, before we can quench their faith and hope in the great Unseen. It will ever be as in days of old, that the sick and sorrowing, the wearied and the widowed, the despondent and the fearful, will gather round the Christ or the prophet or the preacher who can tell them of a Father, of a Saviour, and of light and life beyond. For behold we see through a glass, darkly, and there are so many questions which our poor hearts cannot answer.

## III.

**"We know in part," says Paul, and he is speaking here only of religious things. I think in these days we have come back to that modest disclaimer of omniscience, and have learned with him that we do not know everything about religious things.**

God has given us a Bible and a Christ; but He has not let us into all His secrets. He is continually saying to us: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter"; and, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." The age of all-knowing dogmatism has passed away, the age when men thought they understood all the counsels and intentions of the Divine mind, and could express the whole mystery of God in the sentences of a creed; when they felt quite competent to draw a clear line between the sheep and the goats even before the great day came, and point out the marks of the elect, and tell us exactly what and how many things must be believed before salvation and heaven could be won; when they thought they had taken the exact measure of God's mercy, and could sound with their short plumb-lines the depths of love divine; when they drew pictures of the future life, as if they had trod the heavenly streets, and heard its songs, and seen its shining figures; and when they spoke about the fate of the damned, as if they had looked

down into the infernal pit and seen its lurid horrors. That age of all-knowing dogmatism, with its hardness and presumption and unlovely foolishness, has passed away. The whole Church has become more conscious of its limitations, and is content to say with Paul, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part, and we see through a glass, darkly."

There are hundreds of curious questions which a wise Christian teacher never attempts to answer. He simply says they are in the sealed book which has not been opened for us yet. You say, How many beliefs are required to make a Christian? You say, Are there few that be saved? or will all be saved at last? You ask what the final resurrection means, and the second death, and the coming of Christ, and the millennial reign. You wonder what heaven is like, and its service and joys; and what the other place is; and what the promise means that death and hell shall be vanquished, and all things at last put under His feet. And I tell you simply, candidly, and reverently that I know nothing about these things, and he who thinks he knows, only deceives himself and others. He is attempting to break through the door which God keeps closed, and I do not think that can be a profitable business. And I do not even wish to know these things now. God will tell us His secrets when it is good for us to know them, and it is only wearing out our brains, and frittering our energies away purposelessly, to attempt to discover them before His time comes. We have to do all our

work on the side of a great wall of mystery, and it is of no use trying to look behind it. We see through a glass, darkly, and we know in part.

But *we do know that part*—there is no guess-work there. There is plenty of light on this side of the wall for every cheerful trust and noble duty. We know quite enough to live by and to die by. We know as much of God as Jesus has revealed, and that is sufficient to give us immeasurable trust and hope in Him. We know and have believed the love that God hath toward us, and that is the most precious piece of knowledge in the world. We know whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him. We know that the Lord requires us to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly before our God. We know that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. We know that there is infinite forgiveness with Him ; that the reaches of His mercy and the depths of His grace are unsearchable and beyond all measurement. We know that there is a glad future and a heaven of perfect peace for those who have tried to do His will, and that there we shall serve Him with perfect liberty, and see His face. We know in part. But it is a grand part, and we can patiently wait for that which is hidden, as we walk in the light of the certainties which have been revealed.

## IV.

**And the Apostle tells us here that the gloom and the uncertainty and the childlike groping and guessing about many things are only a stage on the journey, and that stage will end in perfect knowledge and unclouded light.**

Then shall we see face to face ; then shall I know even as I am known. *Even as I am known.* That is a good thing to rest upon, even in this stage ; that, however little I know about you and about myself and about God, I am known to Him, every bit of me, and the way that I take, and the thoughts I think, and the fears which disturb me, and the doubts which worry and the sins which oppress. It is all spread before Him in the searching light which scans and tries the uttermost secrets, and from which nothing can be hid. He knows me as well as He knows Himself. He knows every heart-beat, and every struggle, and every penitential sigh, and every passing shame and regret, and every striving after better things. He knows all the possibilities that are in me, the worst and the best, and all the helps, incentives, and pardons that they call for. And He never misreads, misunderstands, and misjudges. It is always fair, just, true, and pitiful. "And I shall know even as I am known."

I think that is the best thing which the future keeps for us. You talk about heaven's crowns, and

golden streets, and shining rivers, and joys beyond words. But better than all those things, whatever those things may be, is this brief but comprehensive assurance, that we shall know as we are known—face to face, and not through a thick, discoloured looking-glass. *We shall know God*, whom we have so often mistrusted, and with the perfect image of His beauty we shall be for ever satisfied. *We shall know our own poor hearts*, of which we have been so ignorant, and understand the full meaning of our life's strange story. And *we shall know each other*. There is a sort of rapture in that thought ; we never have known each other, no not even our dearest. We have always been reading each other wrongly in the dark ; and even in praying together, and when our lips met, we have misjudged each other ; and all that will pass away when the true light shines, and we shall understand what the perfect love means which has no torment of suspicion or fear.

“ Now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE UNDER  
THREE METAPHORS

By CHARLES BROWN



## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE UNDER THREE METAPHORS

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."—2 TIMOTHY iv. 7 (R.V.).

THERE can be no adequate consideration of these words that does not take into account the circumstances under which they were written. From the subterranean cell of the gloomy Mamertine prison in Rome they come, from which cell there is no exit for the author of them, save through the gateway of a violent death. They are written in retrospect of the greatest ministry that the Church of Christ has ever seen. They are written in prospect of the great white throne which has loomed through the mists for this man during the whole course of his ministry. They are also written in full view of present struggles and perils of the Christian Church. On the one hand menaced by the bitter hatred of the members of the ancient Jewish faith, on the other, by the great world-power of the Roman Empire, lifting its mailed hand to crush and destroy the faith.

In view of all these considerations—the completion of the courageous ministry of Paul, the

nearness to him of the Unseen, the need of leadership in the imperilled Church—the opening words of this chapter gather urgency and solemnity: “I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the quick and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word, be instant in season, out of season”; when it is convenient to you and when it is inconvenient, when men honour you, when they scorn you. “Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil *thy* ministry; for mine is done: I shall preach and write no more, I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”

Surprise has been expressed in some quarters that Paul should write of himself in what seems to be a self-righteous and boastful strain; and some textual critics have seized on this passage as furnishing some sort of suggestion or proof that this letter is not genuine, but that it was written by some admirer of his in the second century. The spirit of the text is so unlike that breathed by William Carey at the close of his unique ministry, and engraved on his tombstone at Serampore—

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall.”

Well, even if there were this self-congratulatory note

which some people see in the text, we must remember that we have here a man who is always writing about himself (he is the most sublime egoist in the New Testament), because he is to himself the most amazing example of what the grace and power of God can do ; also, that the letter is to a dear personal friend, and not a letter to a church, which would naturally become public property. This is probably a letter which the writer never dreamt would be preserved or seen by anybody but Timothy, to whom he is accustomed to pour out his most intimate thoughts, and to whom in a previous letter he has described himself as the chief of sinners. You can understand that, if you have a spiritual friend to whom you are accustomed to tell all the best and the worst that is in you, all your hopes and your fears. But when we come to look into the text, all that seems self-righteous is not there. Paul is not saying, "I have been a good man." He is not even saying, "I have made a good fight of it." The revisers have properly put in the definite article, and have thus rather shifted the centre of thought from the apostle to the nature of life he has lived and the ministry he has fulfilled ; which, mark you, is the life and ministry he wants Timothy to fulfil.

To me, at any rate, the situation is most natural. There is the old warrior, laying aside his weapons, putting off his armour, going to his reward. Here is the younger man, timid, shrinking from hardship, disposed to compromise, inclined to be ashamed of

the apostle's chain, somewhat weak and irresolute in purpose and character, needing a heartening and bracing word. And this is the word that comes to him from one who would pass on the leadership, if possible, to his hands. Here is the Christian life and ministry as I have seen it and sought to fulfil it, as I want you to see it and fulfil it. It is a fight, a race, a stewardship ; so do thou go forth to meet it, and be thou faithful. Under the direction of this master of metaphors let us think—

## I.

### **Of Christian life and service as a fight.**

The term ought not to surprise us. It is most commonly on our lips. We are continually talking of the struggle for existence, of the fight for position, the battle of life. The mother looks at her sleeping child, and the tears fill her eyes and a prayer rises in her heart as she thinks of all the battle, physical, intellectual, and moral, through which he has to pass if he is ever to reach a worthy manhood. She knows that life is full of physical perils, and she tells him that unless he will fight greed and selfishness and uncleanness, his life will be marred and spoilt.

And we come to the highest life that man can live : the life of mastery of sin and of the world : the life of communion with God. It ought not to surprise us that it can only fittingly be described under the term

*battle.* Where did that begin with Paul? Within. Here are his words: "I find a law in my members *warring* against the law of my mind." The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that ye may not do the thing that ye would. I must confess that I come here and there upon a passage that surprises and comforts me in the flashes of autobiography that light up his writings, as: "I buffet my body and bring it into subjection, lest after having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." You hardly knew that he had a body; he seemed a man composed of mind and spirit; but you see by the light of that passage a man at war with that which is seeking to be master, and which *must* be kept in the place of a servant, if life is not to be entirely spoilt. It may not have been that he was in danger of yielding to those coarser cravings which belong to the flesh, but rather that his body cried out for rest and ease and comfort, and against the labour and hardship which his spirit demanded; and what we have is a man who realises that no outward victory could be won worthy of the name unless and until the inner victory was achieved. The Christian life is not the passive, reclining, restful experience that some have thought: sitting at Jesus' feet, leaning on His breast. There is that side; but the battle is to get there, and to keep there. "Believe me," wrote Samuel Rutherford to the Earl of Lothian, "I find it hard wrestling, to play fair with Christ and to maintain a course of daily communion with Him."

It takes the whole of a man the whole of his time to be a Christian. The world, the flesh, and the devil are all real enough to the earnest soul, and must be faced and fought in the pathway to spiritual success. The New Testament does not deceive anybody on this score. The strait gate, the narrow way, the much tribulation, the Cross of which it speaks, as well as the hosts of darkness—all point to a strenuous conflict as the very condition of Christian life.

And although the battle must begin within, it by no means ends there. There is a *cause* of Christ in the earth as well as in a man's own heart; and if you take Paul as a model in any way, you see him the champion of truth and purity and liberty. Fighting against priestcraft in the Galatian letter, against impurity and sectarianism in the Corinthian letter, against idleness in the Thessalonian letter, and much more; till you find him in the Ephesian letter, the letter of the heavenlies, charging people to take unto them the whole armour of God, that they may stand and withstand in the Christian life.

Of course, men can avoid the battle by making terms with the enemy, both as far as the inward strife is concerned and the great moral struggles that are going on in the world. They can say, "These are no concern of mine, and I will not adventure myself in them." But that is not living the Christian life as Paul understood it. It is rather the way in which a man loses his soul. He declares, and he is in accord with the whole of the New Testament, that

Christian life and service is a fight. But what he says is that it is a *good* fight ; and if you will let him give you the full meaning of this word in English, he will tell you that it is a noble, a beautiful contest. Timothy is shrinking from it ; Demas has given it up ; but it is the one fight in the world worth waging. Everybody is fighting, some for wealth, some for place and power. Many a pitiful contest is being waged in the world. Here is the one noble conflict in which the honest warrior will ultimately triumph, and in which completest satisfaction will be his. Never is man so noble in the sight of God and His holy angels as when he is fighting against the base within him and without, striving for goodness, purity, truth and love. Fighting the good fight of faith, striving to lay hold on eternal life.

## II.

**Think, secondly, of Christian life and service under the metaphor of a race.**

There is a little difference here ; for while he is still thinking of the Olympian games, and therefore of strenuous and contested effort, there is something more definite and personal. We must place beside the text other words of Paul spoken to the elders of the Ephesian Church ; in the pathetic farewell interview recorded in Acts xx., when, speaking of the sufferings awaiting him, he said : "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto

myself, so that I might *finish my course*, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus," etc.

A course indicates not only strenuous running, but running over a marked-out and well-defined track. ("If a man strive in the games, he is not crowned except he has striven lawfully.") So the words mean more than that he had run his natural earthly course : they mean that he had fulfilled his God-appointed destiny. "He has held the course, he has kept the line God bade him go." You know his cherished ambition. To apprehend that for which also he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus. To have a life governed absolutely by the will and plan of His Master. And in Acts xvi. 6-10 (which see) you have a man who is searching for the track, and who when he has found it, goes along it without any question. Nothing else mattered. It was a very inglorious course that he had run, from the point of view of the man of the world ; but to the man who ran it, it was full of glory. It was God's course for him, and in that assurance he found infinite peace. And when you and I come to be where Paul was when this letter was written, and we may come there sooner than we think ; when we are about to pass into that Presence in which all earthly distinctions fade away and disappear, the only question worth asking will be, whether we have followed the gleam, and kept the line of God's will. The world will ask how much money you left ; whether you filled an obscure or a

prominent position. The Church will ask whether the minister attracted a crowd, or ministered to a few. Whether he was an orator or a scholar. The angels of God will ask whether he has been plastic to the moulding hand of God. Whether, when the finger beckoned, he followed to arduous duty and lowly service and a solitary path; or whether he was disobedient to the heavenly vision. If God meant a man to be a missionary to the heathen, and told him that, or a minister of the gospel, and he turned away because of more brilliant prospects or an easier life, it is difficult to know what he will say to the Master at the end. If any of us are to make the best of the one life that we have to live here, and if we are to have any peace of soul at eventide; if the joys and successes that we have gathered by the way are not to wither in our grasp and to mock us, we should ask the question now, Are my feet on the track? Am I trying to discover and to do the will of God?

If so, nothing else matters. It may be a very monotonous and obscure way. What Keble calls the trivial round, the common task: unappreciated, un-honoured, unmentioned—writing figures at a desk, soliciting orders, teaching in a school. It is not a question of “what,” but of *how*. Am I doing this as God’s will for me?—running with patience the race set before me, doing my appointed task as unto Him. If so, I may be as certain as this great apostle was in all his weary way, of the crown at the end.

## III.

**Finally, think of Christian life and service as a stewardship.**

*I have guarded the faith*, which means that he had held the truth as it is in Jesus against all comers. He had guarded, too, the holy fire which God had kindled in his own breast. We are always being reminded that our trusts differ. They do. But the point here to be emphasised is that we have a trust. The Christian life does not consist only of our trusting Christ. It begins there. The complementary truth is, that Christ trusts us, and an integral part of faith is faithfulness, fidelity, and there is no true faith without it. I need Christ and He needs me, even as the branch needs the vine, and the vine the branch. I have placed my life in His keeping. He has placed His honour and His cause in mine. Both sides are in these letters to Timothy. "I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed to Him." "O Timothy, that good thing committed unto thee guard by the Holy Ghost."

This is the side of things that I want to emphasise in closing. "A certain man took a journey into a far country, and called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods . . . and after a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them." We know who are meant there, and we know

what God has committed to our trust, and we may know whether our trust is growing under our hand, and whether we are striving at least to be faithful. Our saving knowledge of the gospel, our capacity and opportunity to spread it—these are our main trusts received of the Lord. May He give us grace so to live as to be able to say, in retrospect and prospect, “I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown.”



SEEING THE FATHER

By W. L. WALKER



## SEEING THE FATHER

“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”—JOHN  
xiv. 9.

JESUS said this in answer to Philip's request: “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” Jesus had just said that if they knew *Him*, they would know the Father also—that Father concerning whom He had said so much to them. But they did not understand, and Philip, as their spokesman, said that if He would only cause them to *see* the Father, that would settle all doubts.

In making this request Philip voices the desire, not of those disciples only, but of the human heart, for *assurance*. We want to be quite sure of God and of the Life Eternal. We hear prophets, psalmists, saints, Christ Himself, speaking about God, saying beautiful and most blessed things concerning Him—we want to be sure that they are true. If this loving Father really exists, all is well; but we have never seen Him, and we want to be sure of Him: “Show us the Father; let us in some way *see* God, and we shall be satisfied.”

## I.

**Of course, we all know that in one sense it is impossible that our desire can be met.**

God (assuming His existence) is, and must necessarily be, *Spirit*; and Spirit is, of course, in itself, wholly invisible. "No man hath seen God at any time," by way of outward vision; no man *can* in this way see God—"Whom no man hath seen or can see," says the apostle. A corporeally expressed being, a being embodied like ourselves, whom we could see, would not be *God*. God is the Infinite Spirit, and no embodiment can possibly express Him. It is hard sometimes to believe in the unseen; to go on believing even when we can see nothing of that of which we so greatly long to have some sensible evidence. Yet we must believe in the unseen if we are to live and act in the world. He who will not believe in what he cannot see, will not make much of his life. We all, indeed, the sturdiest unbeliever included, go on each day believing in what we cannot see—believing in the reality of invisible Spirit as the real, active power in the everyday life of men. It is the spiritual, mental, and emotional side of our being, not the bodily, that is our real influential self; and neither our own mind or spirit, nor that of our neighbour, can we possibly see, or discern by means of our senses. Only as a man's body and works make his spirit manifest, can we see anything of the

man at all. And it is only as God is manifested in the world, which is His work, and in our selves, in whom His Spirit finds its highest expression, that God can be manifested and seen by us.

## II.

**Now, I believe that the world in some real measure shows us the Father.**

The story of its creation is a most wonderful one—the way in which this marvellous world of ours has gradually come, through millions of years, into shape and form, coming more and more into fitness to sustain life; and then life itself appearing, and steadily rising higher and higher, till man at length comes on the scene, and finds everything prepared and fitted for his life on the earth. Is it not *very like* the working of an unseen Father, forming and fitting up a Home for His children, and, when all is ready, causing them to arise to live in it? What matters the name by which we designate the process—whether we call it “evolution,” or “creation,” or anything else? And then, when once the human children are here, the world becomes a kind of school to them, wherein they learn the lessons of wisdom, of righteousness, and of love; or *may* learn them if they will—so that manhood develops, and *character* becomes the highest thing in man. Is it not *very like* the action of a Father, sending His children to school—the school

of experience—the only school in which they can possibly grow and become what they are meant to be? And then, once more, What do we see? We behold these same human children beginning to think of their unseen Father, and to feel after Him if haply they may find Him. Surely this is wonderful, this seeking after the unseen God; yet is it not just what children would naturally do, even though it should be at first “as an infant crying in the night, and with no language but a cry”? Why should we ever think of *God* or dream of Him at all, if the world, the experience of life, and some divine instinct deep within our hearts, did not cause us to do so? Browning speaks of

“ . . . plants in mines which never saw the sun,  
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,  
And do their best to climb and get at him ; ”

but the sun is *there*, though hidden from them; and were he not, they never should have felt that upward drawing towards him. So it is something *real*, the attraction of a God and Father to whom we are in our own spirits akin, that creates within us the religious feeling and aspiration.

### III.

**Yet the world and our experience in it does not satisfy us.**

There is much that seems strange to us, and

perhaps even contradictory to our idea of a *Father* of men, and that extorts from our hearts the cry, "Show us the Father." This, however, arises largely from our limitations and from our thinking of God in the image of our own corporeal fatherhood. We are apt to think of Him just as if He were a greater and mightier human father, acting as a good human father would act towards his children. We need to remember that God is *Spirit*. Though His wisdom and power are expressed in His creation, God is not an embodied Person in the world. This is just the difference between Him and ourselves. We are embodied beings, and He is not. He cannot, therefore, act just as a human father at his best would act. An earthly father, for example, sees his child fall into the flames, or into the water, and since he is an embodied being, he can run to rescue his child. Or, if he sees his children hungry, he can go and get food for them, and feed them. He can do these things just because he is an embodied person in the world, capable of acting in it as such. But from God, who is Spirit, we cannot look for such action, *except as the Spirit that He is moves in some embodied person's heart to do it.*

## IV.

**Here we reach the crucial point. Is not God really moving in all our hearts just to that kind of action ?**

What else is the meaning of that sympathy, that *love* which is the highest thing in man? Whence comes originally that inspiration? Who is the source of that movement in human hearts, but just God, the sole Source and Former of our being? It is "the Spirit of our Father" within us. Men can obey or refuse to obey the inspiration; they can let that Holy Spirit of Love move them, or they can be indifferent to it. But, all the same, if we have any reason at all to speak of God as the Source of the power that is manifested in the world and in our life, we must think of that love, which is the highest thing in our life, as the highest form of that same power. Why, for example, should we think of electricity as a form of the Divine power, and not see that the reason and love that rise up within ourselves are other and higher forms of the very same power? Why should we ascribe the lower forms of creative power to God and not ascribe to Him also its higher manifestations? It is just as if we were to extol the mere *force* by means of which a man performs some beneficent feat of physical prowess, and ignore the *love* that *moved* him to it. The love in his heart was the real motive *power*. I have read somewhere of

the captain of an ocean steamer who caused his vessel on its homeward voyage to plough the waves at an enormous rate of speed, because his little child was lying at home dangerously ill, and he was anxious to see her in case she should die. It was *machinery* that drove the vessel, and it was steam that moved the machinery ; but it was that father's *love* for his child that was the real moving force, deeper than all other forms of power.

Now, this leads us to understand how we can *see the Father*. The world is God's work, but His highest work in the world is *man*, in whom Spirit becomes embodied in a finite, personal form. Therefore in a human life wholly formed and inspired by God, and wholly obedient to the movement of God's Holy Spirit—in a human life entirely at one with God—we shall see the Father as fully as He ever *can* be manifested in this world. In other words, we shall behold the unseen Father revealed in the life and work of One who is, in human form, a true and perfect *Son of God*.

## V.

**This is how we see the Father in Christ—we  
see the Father in the Son.**

The Spirit and character of God are made manifest in the action of One whose humanity was the highest product of all God's working in the world, not in nature only but also by His Holy

Spirit, and who in His humanity yielded Himself completely up to the inspiration of the Spirit of the Father within Him. *This is the basal Christian fact.* Followed out, it carries us above the world and time to God in Himself and to the Eternal for the complete explanation of the Personality of Christ. But I do not now enter on the theological implications. I desire at present to keep solely to what is immediately before us all. We want to *see the Father*, and Jesus says to us, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"—seen Me *truly*, that is—not the mere outward vision of His body, which many beheld, yet knew Him not. This must be a vision open to us all—apart from and beyond all particular theologies, or rather, it is necessarily *before* them all. The fact that is patent to all, the ground that all alike must stand on, the basis of all our theology, is the great and simple truth that *in the life of a perfect Son the unseen Father is revealed.* Words merely, teaching only, could not give the revelation. We should still have to ask, Why should we believe the words? The revelation must be given, not in words merely, but in life and works—in a life wholly obedient to the indwelling Spirit of the Father—a life that makes us feel that *here*, at last, our hearts find that which they seek to see in God. If that life is the complete expression of the holiest spirit that moves in man; if those works are the outcome of the Supreme Power dwelling within a human soul, gaining full possession of it, even to

the complete yielding up of the finite self and will in that sacrifice of Christ which manifested the infinitude of the love that moved Him; then, most assuredly, in the vision of that life and sacrifice, we have *seen the Father*, in the highest revelation that can be given of Him in this human world. There is no other way conceivable in which we can *see* the invisible God and Father, save in the life of such a perfect Son.

That, you observe, is how Christ Himself explained it. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet dost thou not know Me, Philip?"—know Me as the Father's Son. "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I say unto you, I speak not from Myself; but the Father abiding in Me doeth His (own) works."

We do not accept this merely on the word of the writer of this Gospel; or because of his particular mode of setting forth the Person of Christ. It is the interpretation of all that we know concerning Jesus Christ as the other Gospels present His life and work, of all that we know of Him from any source whatever. It is what Paul saw in Him when he said, "We behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is what Peter saw in Him when he wrote, "Whom having not seen, we love." It is what the Christian mind and heart have seen in Christ throughout all the Christian centuries; and, seeing the Father thus revealed in the Son, men have found rest and satisfaction to their souls.

Does it not *satisfy* us? What other revelation of the invisible Father can we possibly have than that which is given in the life of a perfect Son? What other medium can there be in this world for the manifestation of God, than a human life wholly moved by His Spirit? And what better God and Father can the heart and mind of man desire than that Holy Father of Grace and Love that the Life and Cross of Christ reveal—that merciful, all-forgiving Father—that Father who is yearning over each one of us with infinite regard—seeking us at such unsparing cost; taking even our sins upon Himself, so that, through the suffering to which the Cross bears witness, His holy love may proclaim our forgiveness so as to bring peace to our conscience in view of our sin, and kindle an answering holy love in our hearts? He is a Father whose sole desire is for the love of His children and the blessing of their lives in Himself. Truly “this is eternal life, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

## VI.

**The practical application is—**

1. *To rest in this revelation*; to let it satisfy us; to draw nigh in our spirits to this loving and gracious transcendent Spirit of our Father; to rest in Him and trust Him wholly. All that the most perfect father

can be to his children this Heavenly Father will be to us.

We hear much said to-day about the immanence of God. It contains a great truth: God is in some measure immanent in us all. But there are *degrees* of immanence. God is not immanent in all men in the same measure. He is not immanent in the degraded savage in the same measure as He is in the self-sacrificing teacher that goes, with his life in his hand, to instruct him concerning God. He was not immanent in our rude forefathers to the same degree as He is in Christian men and women of to-day. The immanence of God in man has always been growing in fulness, and it reached its completeness in Christ. God is not immanent in any one of us with that fulness with which He was present in Christ. But to Christ He was transcendent as well as immanent. Not only was "the Father in Him," but He was also "in the Father." We need the transcendent as truly as the immanent. The immanence has always grown in man by means of transcendent spiritual influences. God is transcendent before He can be in any measure immanent; He remains transcendent even while He is in the fullest measure immanent. It is with the transcendent God and Father, Sovereign and Judge of all men, that we have to do. And from His complete immanence in Christ we come to know the true nature of that transcendent Spirit that is so near us all, seeking to possess us and to have us as His

own dear children, and are enabled to enter into filial relationship to Him. Christ comes telling us of—*showing us* the Father—in order to lead us home to our rest and true life in that Father. It is this transcendent Father who is the God that Jesus Christ proclaims and whose infinite love He reveals: a Father ever near us, the reality of whose all-environing Presence we only need to know in order to be moved to come to Him in our own spirits and be at peace.

2. *But this revelation of God in Christ comes, not merely to give us rest, but to bring us inspiration.* It was in a *human* life that the Father was revealed in Christ. It was the human life alone that men could see. If in that human life the God who is in Himself invisible Spirit was made manifest, then that same God and Father is in some real measure moving by His Spirit in all human hearts, and has been with us all our life through, although we may have discerned Him not. Christ was that Father's Son in such original and perfect fulness as made Him, while truly human, perfectly unique in the world, and raised Him for ever high above all others, constituting Him our Head and Lord. In Him we have not only man but *God in human form*—so complete was the fulness and so perfect the union of the human and the Divine in Him. But still, it was in the *human* life of Christ that the Father was revealed. But *we* are also human, and as such conceived in the very image of God, and meant to be His sons and daughters. If,

then, the true humanity was shown in Christ to be "the habitation of God," in all humanity as such—in all who are truly human—there is something of God. In every man and woman the Spirit of our Father is in some measure moving. If God be not there in the same measure as He was present in the humanity of Christ, He is certainly present *in some measure*, in quite sufficient measure at least to let us know that He is there. We are very apt to forget this, and the fact of the reality of the immanence of God's Holy Spirit should remind us of it. We say,—

"Show us the Father ; cure, O Lord, our blindness :  
Thus up to God the prayers of ages roll ;  
And comes an answer down in wondrous kindness :  
Child, look within thy soul.

"Look thou within : Have I so long been with thee,  
Sharing in love thine every earthly lot,  
In seasons both of joy and sorrow nigh thee ;  
And thou hast known Me not ?"

The revelation of God in Christ throws us back on ourselves to see if we cannot discern the movement of the same Father's Spirit in our own hearts, and the manifestation of His Presence in our lives. We should not be human at all were there not something of God in us ; and if we live in a world that is His and over which His Providence reigns, as Jesus said it did, there are surely *some* manifestations of His Presence and rule that come to us. Is not our capacity to rise to moral and spiritual life something

of God in us? Why should our spirits yearn for God, if they be not akin to Him? Is not conscience His voice within us? Is not the reason that illumines our inner life the shining of the Divine reason within us? What else has made us rational? And is not the love that is deepest and supreme within our souls—the love that would lead us to die to self for the sake of others—the very love of God within us? And, if there is not in us the same measure of the Divine Presence as there was in Christ, the very message of the gospel, the fruit of the Divine revelation in Christ and His Cross, is just this: that through that manifestation of God in Him, the Holy Spirit of our Father comes to dwell in us, if we will, in all Divine fulness, according to our capacity for its reception. This is what Christ promised His disciples in that last great discourse; this is that great “promise of the Father” fulfilled in Christ. Because of this, He assured His disciples of power to live and work for God and man in the likeness of that which they had beheld in Himself: “The works that I do shall ye do also.” “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.”

3. *It is for us, therefore, not only to see the Father revealed in Christ and to rest in that revelation, but for each one of us, according to his measure, to show the Father to those in the world around us.* Jesus was indeed “the Light of the World,” but, as He taught in His Sermon on the Mount, each one of His disciples was to be also a light so shining that men

beholding it might glorify their Father who is in heaven—the Father who could only be *seen* as He was manifested in the life and works of His children. If Jesus alone was the perfect Son, His call to all was that they might *become* the true sons of their Father in heaven by being like Him in their spirit and conduct. If the perfect Son only could give the complete revelation, each son and daughter should be able to give *some* revelation of the reality of God and of the glory of His true character, especially since through Christ the Spirit of our Father comes in all its fulness to all. If it is in the Son that we see the Father, then, in all true sons and daughters of God something of the Father should be seen.

It is this that we need to realise if we would rise to our own highest good and find that fellowship with the unseen Father that Jesus declared was open to men. We are too apt to think merely about getting light and rest to our own souls, without realising that we are called to let the God, whom we have found through Christ, shine in our lives, and so be His servants in the world. “No man,” as Jesus said, “lighteth a lamp to put it under a bushel, but to set it on the lamp-stand, that it may give light to all that are in the house.” It is with a present God and Father that we have to do, to whom we owe a present duty. It is to be the sons of God in this present time that we are called—“children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as

lights in the world." It is not a Christ who showed men the Father in the past we are asked to believe in and receive, but a Christ of the present, who continues to show the world the Father by the indwelling in His disciples of that Holy Spirit which is at once the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, by means of which He seeks to dwell within us, to fill us with His presence, and to make us each, according to the measure of our capacity and in our calling of God, what He Himself was in the world. We cannot all be *Christs*; but we can all be as Christ was in the world—we can all be filled with the same Spirit, Christ-filled, God-inspired, Christ-like in our spirit and conduct, and so, in some real measure, *show the Father*, present, living and acting in His children.

It is this that *the world* needs so greatly to bring it to God, and to its true good and rest in Him. Not merely the manifestation of the Father in the distant past and for a brief season in Palestine—a manifestation which it does not understand and concerning which it may have doubts—but, as the result of that revelation, the manifestation of the same Father as a present, living and loving God and true Father of men, in spite of all that may seem to contradict the reality of His Fatherhood—shown to be such in the lives and works of those who as His sons and daughters yield themselves up to be obedient to the movement of His Spirit within them. It was such a manifestation that Jesus gave, persisting in it in spite of all opposition and ingratitude of men, till it was

crowned and completed by His Cross. And it is in the same way that each one of us is called, not only to see and know the Father in Christ, but, having so seen and known Him, to show Him to the world ; and not by words merely, but by our actions in obedience to the same Spirit as animated Christ, prove to all how real and how good and true our God and Father is. If we leave it to Christ alone to show men the Father, and can only point them back to that complete manifestation of God in the distant past, we need not wonder that the world of to-day will be slow to believe us. But we thus forget the essential conditions of discipleship as laid down by Christ Himself: "If any man would be my disciple, he must deny himself, and take up his own cross, and follow me." Following Him in His Spirit, we shall inevitably become in some real measure like Him, and to that extent we too shall show men the holy and loving Father.

"List to the Voice Divine that speaks within you ;  
Obey the holiest and the best you know ;  
Let Truth and Love and Goodness wholly win you :  
*Christ-like, the Father show."*

And to Him shall be the praise and the honour and the glory, for ever. Amen.



WAITING FOR THE RETURN

By THOMAS G. SELBY



## WAITING FOR THE RETURN

“And be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord.”—LUKE xii. 36.

THE primitive believers attached a much greater importance to the doctrine of Christ's Second Coming than is common in the churches of the present day. It was always in the foreground of their thought, but it is in the dim, obscure background of ours, if at least we leave out of account a despised minority of Christian people who are addicted to the study of prophecy. Of course we hold it as an article of faith, and make formal avowal of it in the Creed, but, for the time being, it does not come into our remembrance and assume a position of commanding influence in our daily religion. Unless the first disciples had held fast to this solemn hope, whatever value they might have ascribed to the work of Jesus as saint, spiritual reformer, and teacher sent from God, they would scarcely have believed in Him as the appointed Messiah promised to the fathers. If it is becoming an established fashion with some of our contemporaries to let the Lord's teaching upon the Second Advent pass out of mind, no wonder they

should go on to say that, whatever else Jesus claimed, he never quite claimed to be the Messiah of Jewish prophecy. But the ideas bound up with that title were to be accomplished in widely separated chapters of history. At His first coming He set Himself by gentleness and forgiving grace to redeem men; and at His second coming He fulfils the great work of judgment, bringing His own followers to the honour and blessedness for which they have long waited, and executing holy vengeance upon the final reprobates of the race. The germ-cell of the primitive idea differentiated itself into a first and a second coming, and the early disciples could not have had a plenary faith in the unique authority of the Messianic mission unless they had looked forward to a manifestation for judgment, as well as backward to a manifestation in the redeeming mercy of the Cross. The first generation of believers never allowed this hope to become dim. They spoke of it in their devout greetings, and made it the password of entrance into their assemblies. It was a ruling idea at every eucharistic feast. We think of the Second Coming as an event that does not immediately concern us, and perhaps may not concern the generations that follow us. The subject is remote, and does not link itself with the immediate practical work of the hour.

## I.

**Why the hope of the Return shone so brightly at the first.**

1. *The early believers, especially those of Jerusalem and Galilee, were greatly moved towards this expectation by personal friendship with Jesus.* The longing felt for His Return, attended by angels of light and clothed with ineffable majesty, is of incalculable value to us as testimony. It shows what manner of man He had been as He walked by the way, and tarried as a guest in lowly and stricken homes. They would not have desired the Second Coming of one who had not made himself, in striking and stupendous acts, the benefactor of his contemporaries. Can we have a better sign of the gracious and supremely winning personality of Jesus Christ than the strong, unwavering desire for His Return cherished by those who had known Him best? Do we need a more convincing proof of that sense of superhuman power He conveyed wherever He tarried? To hundreds and thousands He had made Himself incomparably precious; putting His holy presence between forgiven women and their unfeeling censors; vindicating by His resistless moral influence the cause of the downtrodden and the despised; assuaging fever, banishing disease, and bringing hope into the darkest places of the national life. By countless acts of secret and of open kindness He had caused many

hearts to desire Him with insatiable eagerness. If the dream of a renewed and beautified earth, freed from the curse and delivered from tears, was to be fulfilled, of all the great figures of history He was best fitted to work the change. No bereavement had ever left a gap like that which was felt when Jesus ceased to appear in the midst of His followers ; and His return was desired and watched for as the return of no Jewish father or brother from foreign exile to fill again the vacant place at home. If there had been no fragment of a promise on which to fasten, the combination of spiritual fascination and superhuman power in the character of Jesus would almost have created the belief in His Second Coming. This strong, dauntless desire was a proof of faith in the Master's character, in His invincible power, and in the trustworthiness of the pledge He had given his friends that He would come again and receive them unto Himself. The primitive believers would not have been worth so much to us as witnesses of what Jesus was, apart from this tenacious hope and the attitude of waiting for the Return into which they put themselves for the rest of their earthly days.

2. *The first generation of disciples was shut up to this hope by a political outlook that seemed to preclude the large and final victory of righteousness.* The problems of the kingdom appeared to defy solution, except at the hands of a Conqueror who should descend from the clouds of heaven with a sword girt upon His thigh, wielding the mighty lightnings, and

followed by ranks of destroying angels. The religion of Jesus brought light and peace to the individual believer, filling the home with a new atmosphere of sacredness and upraising the lot of families and groups of families ; but the ruling despotisms scarcely seemed amenable to improvement. There was little prospect of the resuscitation of the old theocracy to whose ideals many were still clinging, or of social purification and improvement under Gentile kings and proconsuls. Martyrdoms seemed to increase, and posts and thrones of power upon earth were rarely given to the Nazarenes. Indeed, things were going from bad to worse, and with the Fall of Jerusalem a complete eclipse seemed to come. As a personal and a domestic religion Christianity continued to spread ; but for the most part, the history of the Church in its relations with the rulers of this world was written in blood. The Spirit could do much for the plain multitude and even for some in higher ranks of life, but those who held in their hand the fortunes of empires seemed to need another regimen. The apostles and their successors began to realise the appalling dimensions and the intractability of the world-problems which rose before them, and they felt there could be no final satisfaction till a Divine King should come to rule amongst men in invincible truth and equity. And the Master's last words—the words most vividly remembered, and reported with copious detail—were an unfaltering pledge of this Second Advent. In those

dark and harassed times they at least were under no temptation to forget. Every movement in the air, every sound in the darkness of the night, drove them into the attitude of servants who wait for their Lord.

3. *The care with which the Evangelists treasure up our Lord's farewell words shows the importance they attached to the subject*, and at the same time becomes an occasion of perplexity to us. The writers do not seem to be always sure of the exact sequence of the topics with which the discourse on the last things dealt, nor did the inspiration they possessed enable them to resolve the uncertainty. As we study the discourse on the Mount of Olives, we feel as though we were looking at a composite photograph, and one moment we see the destruction of Jerusalem, and then behind that we detect a picture that must surely refer to the end of the world. The conversation, so far as it is reported, passes from the one subject to the other without a note of warning. This apparent mixture of two events has led some religious thinkers to say that, at the fall of the Holy City into the hands of the invaders, Christ came the second time, and we must not look for another coming to judgment. Such a view is for many reasons inadequate. The true explanation of the difficulty probably is that in these last discourses we have a mosaic of fragments. At some time or another we have perhaps gone into a very old Church which has been restored. Let into the walls are stones covered with bits of mural painting that belonged to a Saxon

or Early Norman structure. They are too precious to be cast aside, and yet do not always shape themselves into a consistent and intelligible picture. The sequence is broken. They are fragments, but fragments prized beyond all the later decorations. And so the sequence in the discourses in which we find the destruction of temple and city and the Lord's return to judgment combined, is sometimes broken. Links are missing which might set the two events into an intelligible relation to each other. Qualifying statements have failed to find a place in the tradition. But the attempt to preserve every fragment, whilst perhaps an occasion of bewilderment to us, shows the supreme significance attached by the early Church to this solemn truth. It was preached to Caiaphas and his council, announced by the wayside on the journey to Jerusalem, brought before the disciples again as they sat on the Mount of Olives, and spoken of by the angels in the hour of the Ascension as an event, concrete as that on which they had just looked when the form of their Lord passed out of view. They gave the subject a primary place in their faith and meditations, and held, as with a life-grip, the promise that seems to have little or no relevance to our immediate life.

## II.

**How the hope of the Return has now grown dim.**

1. One cause of the inadvertent neglect of this

subject is that *it has become associated with grotesque and oft-thwarted interpretations of prophecy which have tended to bring the Bible into contempt.* Our entire attitude towards the apocalyptic literature has changed, and we are inclined to think that the method applied to the writings of Daniel and the Book of the Revelation of St John has lowered the prestige of the Scriptures. We could almost wish at times that such books had not been included in the Canon. In almost every century a date has been fixed for the end of the world, and the Bible has been looked upon as a mirror of contemporary politics and the issues of international wars. Earth-quakes, volcanic eruptions, eclipses, and comets have been made parts of the stage-property of the pre-millenarian preacher and book-writer. Within the lifetime of men who are not old there has been many an ebb and flow of the tide, a sporadic zeal for prediction followed by disillusionment. The rise of popular interest in foreign politics, pending readjustments of the balance of power, speculations about the fate of the Papacy, and an eloquent voice in a London pulpit perhaps combined to create an excitement not unlike that rife in the apostles' day at Thessalonica. And then when dates and prognostications were found to be much astray, the excitement died down, and a distaste for the subject was felt for nearly a generation. This solemn truth had been degraded. After an interval of dulness and reaction, less instructed sections of

the public were worked by a religious weekly or two, and by rude pictorial caricatures scarcely falling short of blasphemy. And then there came another fiasco, and devout people were made to feel that the Christian religion itself was being degraded by men who were little better than self-seeking freaks. Ineffectual efforts have been made at intervals to revive the subject, in some cases by men of saintly character, but who look at the apocalyptic portions of the Bible through a magnifying glass, and forget the balance of truth and the special conditions under which the Bible was written. Such men are trying to get at the secret of the Father, and to know more than the angels of heaven and the Son of Man Himself. There can be little doubt that in the first part of his career the Apostle Paul himself anticipated an earlier return of Jesus to the world than in the riper periods of his ministry. Perhaps his enlarging view of the world and of God's far-reaching purpose in it, not to speak of thwarted anticipations, may have tended to modify his first view. The steadfast hope, however, was not abandoned. The whole subject in our day has become so mixed up with artificial exegesis and sensationalism, that our reverence is shocked, and our instinct for truth affronted, and we recoil from the subject.

2. *The physical sciences have furnished us with a new scale of time, which we use in judging the life-history of the world.* Archbishop Usher's chronology has no weight with us, and its methods of reckoning

no longer accelerate our expectations of the Second Advent. We smile at the old dream of three dispensations, each lasting two thousand years—patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian—to be followed by the fall of the curtain upon these earthly scenes. The master of physics applies his mathematical methods and tells us twenty millions of years have been occupied in reducing an incandescent gas to a solid, and so cooling the planet as to make it capable of sustaining life. Half a million of years have elapsed, according to the calculations of the evolutionist, since the first cells of organic life appeared. Although no historic records go back for ten thousand years, man, in some rude type or other, has been present on the earth for a hundred thousand years. He has needed epochs, we are told, for his ascent to reason, speech, and civilisation. Such conjectures are of course subject to revision, and have perhaps less authority than some of the religious dogmas decried at the present time. But these views, whatever the measure of proof by which they are sustained, have given to us an enlarged sense of time. If the world has had so long a past, it is an assumption, which easily roots itself in the mind, that the future may be vaster than our forefathers thought, especially in view of the fact that the race has not reached the limit of its progress. The old idea of a Christian dispensation, as brief-lived as the religious economies by which it was preceded, lacks proportion. The stages of

preparation suggest the probability that the present order will last longer than the pre-millenarian arithmetic assumes. These ideas with which we are so familiar may be right or wrong, but they have the effect of putting the Second Advent further away from us in time than our forefathers thought it.

3. *And then, again, we have the half-defined feeling that evil has had such a long reign that the end is not yet.* The balance must be redressed. It would be too much like failure if the development of mankind were to close at the present stage. It cannot be that a fraction of the race only is to be saved, and that God has made men in vain. There are tribes which have not risen above the animal level, or perhaps have reverted to it. Of course such an argument has no relevance for those who are persuaded that after death the probation of the human soul is to be indefinitely prolonged, but those who take the other side of this controversy can only be satisfied by believing that the future has better things in store than the past. As far as the facts which lie within our present horizon warrant us in forming a judgment, the creation of the human race has not been an unqualified success. Something higher is reserved in the after epochs to justify the great facts of the Incarnation and the Atonement. The Cross has not appreciably touched and sanctified the great masses of human life. The races of mankind may surely claim to have more done for their improvement than has been achieved up to the present, and

they are not without signs of promise if new opportunities should unfold before them. Such pleas obviously tend to slacken our expectation of an immediate Advent. Perhaps the Apostle Paul himself came more and more to feel the force of such considerations. Amongst the Gentile races, as his experience widened, he found many who were ripe for the forgiving mercy of the gospel rather than for the overwhelming desolations of the judgment. His readiness at a later stage to reconcile himself to the idea that the Second Coming was not so near in time as primitive believers assumed, may have been due not only to the fact that the predictions were not forthwith fulfilled, but to his wider sympathy with the Gentile world. This was perhaps in his mind when he says that the "man of sin" must first be revealed. The strange name may personify the malignant, intractable residuum of evil continuing in human nature, after all the persuasions of the gospel have been tried upon it in vain. For the present he had not seen the omen. Much that was evil would be changed by the gospel, and that which was unchangeable would show itself at the end of the dispensation as an irreducible deposit of moral malice in the reprobate remnant. For that nothing could avail but final punishment.

4. *And most of us are influenced by the thought that up to the present time Christianity has not had a fair chance in the world. It has not been preached, even in the hard, formal pre-millenarian sense, as "a testi-*

mony to all nations," still less has it been sustained by the witness of a holy, compassionate, and sanctified Church. When we remember how much Christianity is nominal; how the very rudiments of our Lord's teaching are often flouted by the paid functionaries of the Church; how modern civilisations are only a little less pagan than the civilisations of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Rome and China; how some of the postulates of political economy steel the hearts of the rich against the poor; when we think of red rubber, indentured labour sanctioned by whatsoever party in the State, unemployableness, and unemployment, fields which ought to bloom with plenty waste and desolate; when we think of the few Christians who believe in prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit; how for even some churchgoers religion is not of sufficient interest to fill up more than an hour of the day set apart for its exercises; how the assertion of the priesthood of all believers is a theory rather than a working fact; how the State calls itself Christian, and subsists upon the fruits of wickedness—we are ready to say, God's counsels in the First Advent are not yet fulfilled, and the Second Advent can scarcely be at the doors. The dispensation of the Spirit, moreover, is depreciated when we point to intermittent signs of decadence, and underestimate the possibilities of the present age. Jesus came into the world to save, and not to destroy; and neither Church nor world is giving Jesus and His message a fair trial. We put Evangelism on a false basis if we

make the messengers of peace the mere heralds of judgment. Angels of destruction are not those of whom it can be said, "How beautiful are their feet upon the mountains!" The dispensation of the Spirit is only dawning, and the faith of Jesus still needs time and space to justify its place in the midst of the nations. The moral influences dormant in an imperfect Christendom have not been brought into full play, and till a genuine, unabashed Evangel has done its uttermost, we shall never find out what is the deposit of irredeemable malignancy left behind in human nature. The manifestation of "the man of sin," who gathers up into himself the insoluble heinousness of the race, is a landmark which must be passed, before the blast of the judgment-trumpet is heard through the world.

### III.

#### **Reasons for cherishing the hope of the Return.**

I. *In assuming that many centuries may possibly elapse before the Lord's Return, are we not forgetting His own words to watch and be always ready?* How can we be servants looking for the Return, if we persuade ourselves His footsteps are still afar off? But whilst we neither affirm nor deny concerning the day and the hour, it is quite possible for us always to maintain the expectant attitude. Forecasts on either side of the subject may be falsified. One aspect of the

problem, however, is often left out of the reckoning. Our consciousness of time fluctuates at different stages of the present life, and we have no reason to believe that in the disembodied state we shall measure the proximity or the distance of this supreme event of history by the old standards. If the Second Advent is a thousand or ten thousand years hence, when it flashes upon the consciousness, the intervening years will seem few, like the fast-speeding years of the long-lived patriarchs.

2. *Leaving out of the reckoning one or two apocalyptic books, the time-element scarcely seems to enter into the prophecies of the Scriptures.* Two stars tens of thousands of miles apart may seem to touch each other. The traveller sometimes descries from afar a chain of mountain-peaks standing in close array, as though mustered for the roll-call. But when he has tramped a long day's journey and climbed the slopes of the foot-hills, he finds that these peaks, which almost seemed to impinge, are twenty or thirty miles apart. A great gulf of time runs between the redemptive and the judicial elements in the Messianic prophecies, although they are spoken of by the sacred writers as though standing in juxtaposition. The redemptive element is realised at Christ's First and the judicial element at Christ's Second Coming. Epochs do not always differentiate themselves in the prophetic forecasts. Perhaps the explanation may be found in the special nature of the faculties God inspired. The Divine message was visualised to the

perceptions of the sacred writers. Prophets saw the future in symbolic pictures, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to introduce epochs of time into the scenes and the figure-groupings in which the drama of the nations is set.

3. *The Advent is always near to the quick, spiritual consciousness, whatever the coming periods by which the secular historian may have to measure the stages of its approach.* It is sometimes said that we treat death and the judgment as though they were one and the same event, whilst the New Testament makes them entirely distinct and does not put them into juxtaposition. But in the discarnate state the sense of time may be so modified that the two things will become practically coincident, and that too without bringing in the doctrine of a sleep of the soul between death and the resurrection. The sense of time is determined to some extent by the functions of the bodily organism. Before primeval man grasped the idea of astronomical time, he measured it by the sensations of fatigue and exhaustion which arose in the nerves and muscles of the body, by the processes of unconscious digestion, and at a later stage by the position of the sun in the sky. A curious illustration of the instability of the faculties by which man gauges the flight of the days arose some time ago, in a terrible colliery accident in the North of France. Some of the French miners who had been imprisoned with little or no food and drink for three weeks, and were rescued when hope was overpast, thought they

had been there in the darkness for only forty-eight hours. They had lost all count of the hours and the days. Of course they may have spent much of the time in a state of dull, imperfect consciousness, but a suggestive problem in psychology is raised by the incident. Although we have no reason to assume the sleep of the soul between death and the judgment, it is not probable that the scale of time set up during the sojourn in the body will prevail in the discarnate state. Whilst we are still here upon earth, thinking and feeling in the terms of the bodily life, we know how time passes with a speed which admits of the utmost variation. If we are in pain or suspense, waiting for some crisis in our own history, or in the history of those dear to us, we count every tick of the clock through the weary watches of the night. Minutes are prolonged into hours, hours into days, days into a lifetime. A Buddhist writer, who is trying to explain how the soul of a man may suffer ages of torment in the Buddhist hells and be back again after his chastening, in a new bodily form, within five or ten years, says the intensity of the torment prolongs the sense of time. And the sense of time may contract as well as expand. If we are filled full with happiness, engaged in some fascinating study, or absorbed in an enterprise which scarcely gives us a moment for other things, years have sped before we know it. And in the intermediate state, the rest bestowed upon God's servants, the sacred tasks assigned them, the new vistas of knowledge which

invite their thought, may so attenuate the perceptions of time that death and the judgment will seem to touch each other in the consciousness. At least, the coming is always at hand.

4. *The faith of the disciple, informed and strengthened by those daily judgments of forgiveness which the Spirit of Jesus conveys to the consciousness, passes in due time into a prophetic sense which brings the Second Coming to the very doors.* The slow count of the earthly centuries may be an irrelevancy. St Paul seems to view the assignment of rewards by the righteous Judge at His appearing, in the same line of vision with his own imminent martyrdom. Writing to Timothy, he says: "I am now being offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day." In an earlier epistle he had spoken of being clothed in Christ's righteousness. The robe is the mark of maturity and full citizenship. But beyond this there is the royal honour bestowed upon a character perfected in truth and rectitude. The faith of the apostle had passed into a sacred vision which annulled the years between the heart-sickening scene of his martyrdom and the resplendent judgment-throne. He was no legalist feeling his way through penance and self-discipline to a faint hope of salvation. He loved the Lord's appearing, and rejoiced in the forecast, for, although accounting himself the chief of sinners, he was assured that

grace would reign and triumph in the last great Assize. The catholic temper of the man leads him on to say that this crown was not his distinction as an apostle and a great martyr, but the selfsame hope belonged to the great multitude of those who had been brought to love the Lord and to desire His manifestation in the clouds of heaven. "And not only to me but also to all them that have loved His appearing." Some years ago I heard a Roman cardinal preach a sermon, beautiful in some respects, upon the text, "In my Father's house are many mansions." The rank of every saint was as rigidly graded by the cardinal as the guests at a royal banquet. Next to Jesus was His holy mother. Then came the twelve apostles in a group apart, and after them the holy martyrs. Saints of inferior degree filled the lower ranks. The democratic cardinal would have made a fine master of ceremonies and could have put every man into his proper place to a shade. He knew who had the right to be above the salt and who below. But the apostle arrogated nothing for himself because of his heroic toil and an unselfish death. He had preached a gospel of catholic grace, and every man who could stand the test of having loved the Lord and longed for His appearing, was to receive the crown. Jesus comes the second time, not to make Himself an offering, but bringing rewards in His hands for those who accept His grace, and to destroy the man of sin by the breath of His mouth. "To them that look for Him

shall He appear the second time, apart from sin, unto salvation."

5. *We cannot let this subject fall into a subordinate and neglected place in our thought without grave spiritual loss.* In spite of mental limitations and artificial methods of interpreting Scripture, those who put much stress on the Second Advent often have a vivid and consuming love to the Lord Jesus, others would do well to emulate. The idea of a spiritual judgment of the world, for the exercise of which Jesus has already returned, does not satisfy the requirements of the inspired Scriptures. Of course there is a silent and unseen judgment passed upon us moment by moment, of which we are all the subjects, and perhaps it is the sum of those judgments which will be manifest in the last great day. The inward sense of them, which is constantly being enforced upon the conscience, may suddenly translate itself at the end of the world into solemn envioning realities; but the Second Advent is so often compared with the First and set forth in parallel language, that it must partake of the same visible elements. The successive judgments, daily and hourly passed upon us by Him who searches the hearts and tries the reins, will then be gathered up and reflected into the vision of the assembled nations. His promised coming ought to make the exercise of patience an easy and a quiet task. It saves the aggrieved spirit from the wasting sense of wrong. If we have reaped the blessed fruit of His first appearing, we

shall look for His Second Advent with wistful and eager minds. "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." Death and the Second Coming may have such a correlation in the Christian consciousness that the comfort of the promise is perhaps equally felt both in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. That we are busy with prosy and common tasks, is no disqualification for the end to which we are hastening. The Master found some of His disciples absorbed in humble toil when, at His First Coming, he chose them to be with Him. And at His Second Coming He will call men to places of honour from mean and lowly pursuits. We need not, in a fever and frenzy of distraction, abandon our trivial, unromantic routine, as did some of the new converts at Thessalonica. The best preparation is to be honestly and faithfully employed.

"Behold I come quickly." What, after the lapse of nearly twenty centuries have not the words lost all meaning? To us and to our friends within the veil, it is but as the twinkling of an eye. The Judge will be here sooner than we know, and the intervening centuries and huge, sundering millenniums will have sped as a watch in the night. The day will not be a day of dread, if we are in union with our Lord and He comes to us as a familiar Friend. "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!"



BE OF GOOD CHEER

By GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.



## BE OF GOOD CHEER

"Be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee."—MATTHEW ix. 2.

"Be of good cheer : it is I ; be not afraid."—MATTHEW xiv. 27.

"Be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world."—JOHN xvi. 33.

IN reading our Bibles we can never fail to be struck by the tone of hopefulness that runs through them. The prevailing note is joy rather than sorrow ; victory rather than defeat. And when we turn more particularly to the teaching of our Lord, is it not always to find Him striving to raise men above the troubles by which they are beset, and to inspire in them new confidence and hope ? And hence it is that one of His favourite watchwords is, "Be of good cheer," or, as we find the same word rendered on other occasions in the Gospels, "Be of good comfort."

Nor was this word upon the lips of Christ the mere thoughtless utterance of one who had blinded himself to the real ills of life, and desired only to keep them as far as possible out of sight. Nor, again, was it the call to a courage which He had not

Himself experienced, or was unable to bestow upon others. Rather, on each occasion, we find that He has read the inmost hearts of those whom He addresses, and accompanies His call to "be of good cheer" with a promise that renders its fulfilment possible. Let us try and see how this is so in connection with the three occasions of our three texts. If we look at them closely, we shall find, I think, that they are intended to meet and remove the threefold burden by which in all ages men have been weighed down and oppressed—*the burden of the past : the burden of the present : and the burden of the future.*

## I.

**Christ bids us "Be of good cheer" in view of the burden of the past; and He does so, because He takes that burden away.**

Look for a moment at the old story. Here is a man who has been brought into the presence of Christ suffering from palsy. He is completely bed-ridden, unable to move or care for himself in any way. And in the eyes of the friends who have brought him, and of the crowd who are looking on, it is this—his helplessness and suffering—which constitutes his special need. But Christ knows better. He knows—perhaps He and the man alone know—the sinful excesses and folly by which that sickness has been caused, and that not till the guilty

past has been blotted out can the poor sufferer win back his self-respect, and become a new man again. And so before He heals his bodily sickness, and bids him "arise and walk" from the bed of suffering on which he has lain so long, the Saviour goes down to the very root of all his troubles with the glad assurance, "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

And so with ourselves. Can any of us say that, left to ourselves, the past has no terrors for us? Have we experienced no anxious dread of sins secret, sins open, sins which our own consciences tell us have raised up a barrier between ourselves and God, and which, so long as they remain unforgotten, unforgiven, are deserving only of judgment?

Or is it not rather just the memory of the guilty past which so often takes the life and hope out of a man, which makes him careless and indifferent, and sometimes leads him in despair to plunge into greater excesses than before? "If I had only my life to live over again!" such a man cries; "if I could only make a completely fresh start, I would see that my life was something very different from what it has been: but now—who can free me from the sinful man I am?"

Christ can and will. Forgiveness! full, free forgiveness, that is the very first message of His gospel. A fresh start! why that is just what He came to give us all.

Do not let the greatness, the wonder of the

promise blind us to the reality. As believers in Christ, as those who have been baptised into His Name, and who by their own definite act have again and again claimed the highest privileges He has to bestow, we stand before Him to-day forgiven men and women. "The old things are passed away: behold, they are become new."

You remember how it was with Bunyan's Pilgrim—how, when he came up to the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and, tumbling into the sepulchre, was wholly lost to view. "Then was Christian glad and light-some, and said with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by His sorrows, and life by His death':" and giving three leaps for joy, he went on his way singing.

Our joy should not be less than his. Whatever the burden the past has brought with it, we have left it, where he did, at the foot of the Cross. And it is for us, as for him, to strive to live worthily now of the high calling wherewith we are called, and to go forward with the courage and the hope of those who have heard their Lord's own voice saying to them, each one: "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

## II.

**But we must not—and here we pass to our second burden, the burden of the present—we must not expect, therefore, to find everything made at once smooth and easy for us.**

Such was not—to return to the allegory—Christian's experience. Though he had left the burden of past guilt behind, though he had resumed his journey a forgiven man, still at every turn he found himself exposed to fresh temptations and trials. At one time the Hill of Difficulty had to be climbed: at another, he had to pass through the Valley of Humiliation. Lions and giants were in his path, eager, if possible, to terrify and turn him back. Day by day he found that the new life on which he had entered demanded of him increasing effort if he was to live it aright.

And such has ever been the experience of Christ's disciples. It was so with the first disciples of all in that striking narrative from which our second text is taken. They had just been witnesses of one of their Master's most wonderful miracles, as He fed the multitudes in the wilderness. They had marked the enthusiasm with which in consequence He had been hailed, and perhaps had begun to imagine that He would seize this opportunity of openly announcing Himself as the long-expected Messiah and Deliverer. But no; instead, He sent them,

His disciples, away to the other side of the lake, and the expression used, "He constrained them to enter into the boat," shows how unwilling they were to leave Him; and He Himself "went up into the mountain apart to pray." It is evident that the Saviour desired to prove His disciples, to bring home to them a full sense of their own weakness and their entire dependence upon Him, by the peril of the storm to which they were so soon exposed. But He did not, therefore, forget them, and in their hour of need He Himself came to them on the waters, calming their fears, and comforting their hearts with the assurance, "Be of good cheer: it is I."

And is it not this same living Friend and Lord who comes to His people still? Though no longer visibly present in our midst, "though now ascended up on high," He still "bends on earth a brother's eye," and, "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," is able and willing to help us in our need.

How often it is, in the very difficulties and sorrows that seem at the time most to separate them from Him, that in reality the Saviour draws nearest to His disciples. Have we not found it so in our own experience? It is not when things have been moving most pleasantly and easily with us, when we have not been conscious of a want, and our cup of earthly happiness has been full to the very brim, that we have realised best the friendship and the sympathy of Christ. But in the hour of temptation, in the dark hour of sorrow, when all human aid

seemed powerless, then it is that we have heard His voice whispering, "It is I," and over the very waves which our own doubts and fears have raised He has come, and at His voice the storm of passion or of suffering has been hushed into calm.

"Well roars the storm to those that hear  
A deeper voice across the storm."

And to all who look to Him, and wait for Him, the Saviour is still drawing near and saying, "Why are ye fearful? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Be of good cheer: it is I."

### III.

**Christ bids His people "Be of good cheer," face to face with the burden of the future.**

That, again, is a burden which at some time or other we must all have experienced. We may have been rejoicing in the fact that our past sins have been blotted out; we may have been finding ever fresh supplies of grace and strength for our daily task, when the thought of the future, with all that it may bring with it, has cast its dark shadow across our path. It has all seemed so uncertain, so unknown. We have shrunk from it in doubt and fear.

Some such feelings, I take it, must have been working in the apostles' hearts when the Lord addressed to them our third and last word of hope.

He had just told them that He was about to leave them. He had made no mystery of the sorrow and tribulation that would be their lot in the world. And yet not for a moment would He have them indulge in vain, useless regrets, or shrink from the work to which they were called. "In the world ye shall have"—or, rather, "ye have"—have now, and as a foretaste of what awaits you hereafter—"ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Although the trial and the scourging and the Cross still lay before Him, already the Saviour felt that the world was a conquered foe, and in the victory which was His He called upon His disciples to share. As His followers, they would enter upon a struggle the issue of which was already decided. They would not be so much contending for victory, as reaping the fruits of a victory already won.

It is a promise full of comfort for us at all times. We cannot but be only too sadly conscious of our own exceeding weakness. How shall we be enabled to stand firm? How shall we face the temptations and the trials we are bound to encounter in our journey through the world? Only as we go forward, not in our own strength, but in the strength of Him who has called us; only as day by day we learn to trust more entirely in His ever-sufficient grace. "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that

overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

A friend tells us that when Dr John Brown, the kindly physician of Edinburgh, lay dying, she visited him one Sunday after church, and he asked her what had been the text. She repeated the words: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

"Wonderful words!" he murmured, and then folding his hands, and closing his eyes, he repeated slowly, "Be of good cheer," and then after a pause, "And from Him, our Saviour."

That simple comment is the key of the whole—the sum of all we have been trying to learn. It is because Christ is the Saviour—our Saviour from past guilt, from present trial, and from future dread, that His word to us all is, "Be of good cheer."



THE MANY MANSIONS

By GEORGE H. MORRISON, M.A.



## THE MANY MANSIONS

“In My Father’s house are many mansions.”—JOHN xiv. 2.

THERE is a note of certainty about these words of Jesus that is more impressive than the closest argument. One feels that, in talking of the things of heaven, Christ is moving among familiar scenes. We are not unaccustomed to the attitude of thinkers when they begin to speculate on the beyond. We know how cautiously they walk—how guardedly—how they throw out hints and offer us conjectures. They are like climbers on some untrodden mountain, who stand on the verge of a dense and chilling mist, and who dare not go forward save with groping steps, not knowing what is before them in the darkness. But when we turn to the words of Jesus Christ, we get a totally different impression. Here is no groping, no wistful peradventure, no cry that is half a hope and half a question. On the contrary, here is a quiet assurance, as of one who was quite familiar with it all. He speaks as a man might speak, in some great city, of the village where he spent his happy boyhood, and of the village-life that was still so vivid to him after the lapse of many a chequered year.

Now in the New Testament there are three outstanding images that are used to portray for us the world beyond. Each has its own peculiar significance ; each has its own abundance of suggestion. Sometimes heaven is spoken of as a *country*—" They plainly declare that they seek a better country." A variety as of nature will be there, and a beauty and peace as of fair scenery. Sometimes heaven is spoken of as a *city*—" He looked for a *city* whose builder and maker is God." Life in its fulness such as a city carries—life intermingled in infinite relationships—that also will prevail in the beyond. And sometimes heaven is spoken of as a *home*, a figure that was very dear to Christ—" In My Father's house are many mansions." When a friend of mine in one of his last days was speaking to another about eternity, " Ah," he said, " how dreary it would be if there were not the presence of the Father in it all." And I think that the image of heaven as a home was specially dear to the heart of Jesus Christ, because, even more than city or than country, it carried the suggestion of the Father. For it is not the four walls that make a home, nor the spaciousness nor yet the number of its chambers ; nor any decking of its rooms with costly pictures, nor heaping of luxuries which wealth commands—these may be *in* the home, and yet are not of the home ; all may be present, and yet may a man be homeless—and all by swift reverse may be removed, and yet may the home be more a home than ever. It is mutual love and trust that make the

home. It is affection—it is obedience—it is reverence. It is the silent gathering of tender memories—it is the birth and crowning of sweet hopes. It is the tie that binds the father to the child—the child to the father—the husband to the wife:—it is that which forms the fabric of the home. It is such thoughts, brethren, that we must carry into that word of Christ, “My Father’s house.” Trailing clouds of glory do we come from God—who is our home. And now I think we are ready to examine what is the meaning of the many mansions—“In My Father’s house are many mansions.”

### I.

**In the first place, I find in the many mansions a pledge of the continuance of individuality.**

Not only in heaven is there room for *all*, Christ wants us to learn that there is room for *each*. It is true we shall share a common life in heaven, for every thought that we think shall be in God. In a far larger measure than we experience here, in Him we shall live and move and have our being. But so far will that common life in God be from merging us in indistinguishable being, that, on the contrary, the very light we shine in will make the thousand differences clear. It is a matter of common observation how a room gets stamped with the impress of its occupant. We may not all make our mark upon the

world, but all of us set our mark upon our room. Is a man studious, and fond of books? A glance at his study will reveal the truth. Is he an earnest lover of true art? You have but to look at his walls, and they will tell you. There is a distinctive note about a room that is the favourite chamber of an aged person. There is an unmistakable touch about a room that has known the ordering of a lady's hand. Nor can you quite disguise a sickroom, nor the upper chamber where the children play, nor the parlour where the mother loves to sit, nor the little bedroom where the schoolboys sleep. Let a working woman be a slut by nature, and it will be written large upon her kitchen. She will always have some excellent excuse, with which a minister grows painfully familiar. But let her have the instinct of neatness in her heart, and you will read it in the poorest dwelling, although she has to toil from morn to night, and has little children beside her all the day. In a deep sense, then, the room in which we live becomes the sign and sacrament of character. It comes to be the mirror of ourselves; to bear the impress of our individuality. And when Jesus, turning His thoughts to heaven, says, "In My Father's house are many rooms," He means that there, though we shall be in God, yet shall we stand apart and be ourselves.

Brethren, it is well to be reminded that this is the consistent teaching of the gospel, for, if I read the signs of the times aright, it is a truth that is somewhat discountenanced to-day. You rarely meet a

thinking person now who believes that at death there is annihilation. The day of that crude materialism has set, and the verdict of science is against extinction. But you *do* meet many whose thought of the hereafter is that of a kind of unified existence, in which we shall no longer be distinguishable, but shall be merged into a mighty tide of life. It is better to believe that than to believe that death is supremely and totally victorious. Even if I cease to be, yet if my life live on, it is something to strive for—to swell the tide of goodness. And yet how far away is that conception from the glorious certitude of Jesus Christ, who said to the penitent thief upon the cross, “This day shalt *thou* be with *Me* in Paradise.” Not as a spacious hall alive with beings, does Jesus speak of the eternal home—not as some vast and unpartitioned chamber, like the Sheol of the old Hebrew thought. He speaks of it as a house of many mansions, where all shall sit at the table of the Father, and yet where each shall draw apart from all, and be himself in happy quietude.

## II.

**Once again, this thought of the many mansions is a prophecy of the wide appeal of Christianity.**

One of the lessons we have now learned about the prophets, is that the prophets were men who spoke

to their own time. Their primary message was not to future ages; their primary message was to their present hour. It was to the men around them that they spoke—it was *their* sins they condemned—*their* hopes that they reanimated,—and it was because they were so true in that, that their words have an unceasing application. Now Jesus Christ is our Prophet, Priest, and King, and as our Prophet He speaks in the same manner. It is His disciples, who were so sore beset, and whose future was all so dark, whom He consoles. And yet His words so breathe the breath of God, and so rise above the accidents of time, and are so instinct with a life that is eternal, and have such a heart-beat of unchanging love, that no fulfilment ever can exhaust them, nor any passing of years make them outworn. We may truly say that every year that fled gave the disciples new insight into Christ. Their grasp of His great sayings was but feeble when they first heard them in the ways of Galilee. And it was only when He had departed to the Father, and the years had brought intensity of need, that they began to fathom the depths of consolation that lay in the table-talk of their Redeemer.

Now this, I take it, is very specially true of such a word about heaven as forms our text this morning. That it had an immediate and glowing meaning for His own, we can see at once when we recall the scene. Was there ever a little company of men more diverse in disposition than the Twelve? That

little company who followed Christ would almost seem to be the world in miniature. Thomas was there, the man of melancholy, who haunted the dim margins of despair. Peter was there, with his big and generous heart, swift to act, equally swift to speak. Philip was there, practical and cautious; and Simon Zelotes, a fiery insurgent. And John was there, with a mighty heart on fire, and ready to call down fire on the Samaritans, and yet even already, under the grace of Christ, taming its passion into the flame of love. Would there be room in heaven for all of these, so diverse and so different from each other? If they quarrelled as they journeyed to Jerusalem, would the New Jerusalem hold them all in peace? Ah, I can picture Jesus at the table, smiling upon that strangely sorted company, and saying to them, "Let not your heart be troubled: in My Father's house are many mansions." There is room there for eager-hearted Peter. There is room there for melancholy Thomas. There is room for the revolutionary Simon. There is room for the practical and cautious Philip. Not everyone in heaven will be a John. There will be a place for Matthew, the despised publican. "Do not be troubled, Matthew, that you are not a Peter, for in My Father's house are many mansions."

But as the years went on, after the Resurrection, the words would deepen in meaning for these men. And they would deepen just because their preach-

ing met with such wonderful success. Philip the Evangelist was sent to the city of Samaria, and the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. He mounted the chariot of a heathen African, and found the Book of Isaiah in his hands. Peter was sent away to Babylon, and Babylon was the very type of Anti-christ. John was commissioned to preach Christ in Ephesus, and great was Diana of the Ephesians. And the gospel came to gentle women like Lydia, and their hearts, we read, were opened by the Lord. And it came to men of iron like the Philippian jailer, and they cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" And it reached the conscience of runaway slaves like Onesimus, and it appealed to the officers of Cæsar's household, and it conquered eloquent speakers like Apollos, and it made Agrippa tremble on his throne. Now, what I ask you to remember is that the men who preached that gospel had been Jews. They had been cradled in the thought of the old covenant; they had never dreamed of a world-wide love and mercy. And when the message that they preached broke down these barriers, which had been of old the safeguard of their patriotism, can you not feel that the triumph of the gospel must often have made them troubled in their hearts? It was *then*, when they were out in the broad world, that the Spirit would bring this message to remembrance. It was in Samaria, in Ephesus, in Babylon, that they would fathom the depths of its significance. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be

afraid. In My Father's house are many mansions." There was room there for the Philippian jailer, and there was room for the Thyatiran lady. There was room for the convert from the darkest heathenism, no less than for the proudest of Pharisees like Paul. Broad is the world, and many are its nations; but broad as all humanity is heaven. To many races and types did Christ appeal; in His Father's house were many mansions.

And if the experience of the apostles deepened this great text, the flight of the centuries has done the same. For I know nothing more wonderful in history than the extraordinary range of Christ's appeal. Think of a noble poet like John Milton, master of all the learning of the ages; contrast him with a savage chief in Livingstonia, a man whose hands have been steeped in human blood. Save in the fact that they are human beings, what possible bond can you find between the two—yet both have bowed at the feet of Jesus Christ. Think of a Christian statesman like Mr Gladstone, burning with moral anger against evil; contrast him with the woman of the streets, who has flung her womanly honour to the winds. Are they not separated as by the poles asunder—yet both have yielded to the grace of Christ. There is room in the love of God for each of these. There is room in the home in heaven for each of these. There is room for the poet there, and for the statesman; for the dullest peasant, and for the heathen African. "Let not

your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. In My Father's house are many mansions."

### III.

**Lastly, there is a suggestion in our text of the bridging of the gulf between earth and heaven.**

It is true, brethren, that, literally applied, the words "My Father's house" apply to heaven only. It was of heaven that Christ was speaking here; it was with heaven He was comforting His own. When a saint draws near the appointed span of life, more and more do his thoughts go out to heaven. He dwells on heaven with an increasing joy, as you may read in many a biography. And it is, indeed, one of the last rewards of a life that has been spiritually true, that when the shadows of the twilight fall, it hails the glory dawning in Immanuel's Land. Now I do not think you will find me wrong in saying that so it was with Jesus Christ our Lord. He did not hail the cross, He hailed the glory, of which the cross was a God-appointed part. And ever, as He drew nearer to the end, He dwelt more intensely on Immanuel's Land, until at last for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame. For these reasons, as well as from the context, there is no doubt as to the first meaning of our words. Primarily, and as spoken to the Twelve, the House of the Father was the heavenly glory. It is only thus

that we can understand what follows: "I go to prepare a place for you."

But, brethren, while that is true, I still think we may widen out the words. We may give them a larger yet not opposing meaning, which blends harmoniously with the mind of Christ. There are two glories in the words of Jesus; the one is, that He made heaven so real, and the other is, that He made this present world thrill to its finest chord with the Divine. Spite of all the havoc sin had wrought, this world was full of God to Jesus Christ. There was God in every lily of the field. There was God in every fowl of the air. In all the love of a mother for her child, in the hunger and thirst of the most sunken heart, there was that which spoke to Jesus of his Father, and told Him that the Divine was here. I do not think you will ever find our Lord speaking of this earth as a barren wilderness. It was all too rich and wonderful for that—too full of the glowing presence of His Father. This earth was part of the dwelling-place of God—it was one of the mansions of the Father's home—it was the outer chamber of the glorious palace, whose throne-room is where the angels are. Yes, in our Father's house are many mansions, for wherever there is existence there is God. And one mansion, where they need no candle, is only opened by the key of death. But another is here, and its ceiling is the sky, and its carpeting is the herbage of the meadows, and its pictures are the mountains and the moor-

lands, and the lamp that brightens its darkness is the sun.

Brethren, in such a thought as that, is there not an easing of the weight of death? It is all one house—it is all the Father's home—and we and the dead but dwell in different rooms. Not into any far country do we travel in the awful moment when this life is done—not through a shadowy and undiscovered land has the soul to journey that it may be with God—it is only a passing from one room to the other; a step through the veil into a brighter chamber—there is no facing of the storm or of the night, for we never are beyond our Father's roof. I can understand a country child being afraid when it is sent out in the darkness on some errand. For it goes out alone into the night, and the road is lonely, and every shadow awesome. But when a child is called into the dining-room that it may be with its father and its mother; when it leaves the schoolroom with its weary tasks, and goes to the room where its father and mother are; *that* moment, if childhood and fatherhood be real, is one of the brightest moments of its day. Brethren, in our Father's house are many rooms, and death is but the leaving of the schoolroom. Not on some perilous journey are we sent, out of the home, into the stormy night. 'Tis but a step, and lo! another room—brighter and larger than the one we left—for our task is over, and our schooldays done, and we shall be glad with God for evermore.

# THE PROOF OF DISCIPLESHIP

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## THE PROOF OF DISCIPLESHIP

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."—JOHN xiii. 34, 35.

THIS was really the text or introduction of our Lord's last sermon. It was the opening sentence of that memorable discourse which He gave on the evening which preceded the day of His crucifixion. A discourse which we associate with the scenes of His suffering, and which might almost be called His last will and testament. It was spoken to the little band of disciples who virtually composed the Church. There were eleven of them, for the twelfth had just departed to carry out his fell purpose. The Master had waited until he was gone, as if the presence of the traitor held His lips and threw an oppressive shadow over the company. That false heart plotting its wickedness was like a nightmare on His spirit, and He really besought the man to go. "What thou doest, do quickly." Then, relieved of that disturbing presence, He recovered His habitual calm, and spoke to the true and trusted men who remained these

words: "Little children, a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you."

Now, it is not clear at first sight what He meant by calling this a new commandment. What was there in it which He had not said in many a previous discourse? He had, in fact, given larger commands than this, which included this and a great deal more. He had told them that love was the fulfilling of the law, and that law and prophecy were summed up in the words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." He had further enjoined upon them, in the Sermon on the Mount, not only to love kinsmen, friends, and fellow-disciples, but to love their very enemies and those who hated them. Did not those wider sayings cover and imply the word spoken here? Why did He call it a new commandment? Chiefly for this reason, that He was laying down here for the first time the great rule and principle which was to bind His disciples together into a Church. He was showing them what He intended to be the prevailing note and distinguishing mark of the Church, that which would separate it from the world and evidence to the world its Divine origin. The mutual love of disciples inspired by and modelled after the love of Christ for them, was to be the one prominent feature of the new society, by which it would be known and certified. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."

## I.

**First, then, our attention is arrested by this thought : That Christ would have us learn the wider love by loving first and best those who are spiritually akin to us.**

He was sending His disciples out into the world as its great philanthropists. They were to have kindly, pitiful, saving thoughts towards all men, and to be throbbing and burning with what we now call the enthusiasm of humanity. Every human face was to be dear to them, just as every human face had been dear to Him who came to save the lost. Yes, they were to love all men without regard to class, race, and condition. But that wider affection was to grow and spread out of their more intimate and peculiar love of each other. Philanthropy was to have its roots in the sweeter fellowship of a spiritual brotherhood, and the Church was to be the furnace in which their hearts would be heated and fired with tender and compassionate emotions towards the world. Christ laid down this rule because He knew human nature so well. Love always begins in the smaller circle before it passes to the larger sphere outside. Its roots are in the home, nurtured and watered there before its fruits are found in the street, the city, and the world.

If a man has no intense affection for those nearest to him, all his talk about universal philanthropy and

cosmopolitanism is mere sentimental vapour and empty rhetoric. Humanity at large can never be particularly attractive to us until we are drawn with impassioned sympathy towards a few whom we know best. If a mother does not love her own child, you will hardly expect any great display of tenderness towards other people's children. If you do not heartily love your friend, I should scarcely look for any great outpouring of affection on your enemy; and if you have no sweet drawings towards the men who kneel in prayer with you, I would not give much for your professions of charity towards all creeds. The souls that claim our first love, outside the home at least, are the souls linked with us by Jesus' love. If you are not drawn towards those who walk in the light with you, if a common faith and a common hope and a common share in the great inheritance and in the possession of Jesus' name do not suggest kindly sympathies and warm tender thoughts, you will not have much pity for the unbelieving multitude, or much care and affectionate interest for the man in the street. Love your Christian brother first, with whom you have all great things in common, and then in course of time you will begin to discover that you have a bit of love for every human brother you meet. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you."

## II.

**The second thought is, that by this love they would commend and prove their Christian discipleship to the world.**

“By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples.” Jesus believed and foresaw that in proportion as mutual love pervaded His Divine society and ruled there, would it give forth a mighty witness to the world, and draw men to it. A world full of hatred, envies, and dissensions would be sure to feel the attractive force and the fascinating spell of this wonderful new thing planted down in the midst of it—a society in which love was the predominant element, and in which all sorts and conditions of men clave together as brothers. And that, as we know from unimpeachable testimony, was what actually took place in the early days of our faith. There were divisions and parties from the first, as Paul bears sad witness, but these were rather the exception than the rule, and alongside them and underneath them there was an impassioned love among the faithful, deeper and more genuine perhaps than the Church has ever known since. It came to be a common exclamation of surprise among the heathen: “Behold how these Christians love one another!” A score of pagan writers have borne their witness to the fact, whilst professing their utter inability to account for it. It was a wonderful thing! strange, novel, and inexpli-

cable. For the first time in the world's history a society appeared in which men of all races and of the most diverse conditions, cultured and illiterate, rich and poor, master and slave, buried their distinctions in the grave of a sweet forgetfulness, or rather, as we should say, in the grave of their risen Lord; and clung to each other through evil and good repute, through suffering and persecution, with an intense affection almost surpassing that of family life, an affection which nothing short of death could quench.

It was an *object lesson* to the world. It served as a *magnet* to the world. It was the sweet mystery which filled the world with amazement, and then attracted it. Hearts grown sick and weary of the jealousies, alienations, hatreds, and bitterness which were all around them, fled to this new society, to find peace in its atmosphere of love, as the dove came to the ark to rest its tired wings.

That sweet young life of the Church did not last long. The battle of the creeds, and the fierce battle of hierarchies for place and power, soon put an end to that short, blessed love-dream. And never since then has the world said of the Church, "See how these Christians love one another." It has far more frequently been entitled to say, "See how these Christian sects and parties hate one another." Yet who can have a doubt that the witness of the Church would have the same prevailing force as of old if the old conditions were restored, if once again in the company of the disciples this new commandment

were obeyed: "That ye love one another as I have loved you." If ever there is to be a new and larger Pentecost, a great revival of religion, it will be preceded by an outpouring of the spirit of love into the hearts of Christ's people everywhere. The weapons of our warfare have lost their convincing and converting force because we so often turn them against each other. Every earnest and anxious Christian sadly confesses that the divisions, dissensions, and often embittered strifes in the Christian host stultify to a large extent its witness to the world and its saving efforts. The world looks in vain for that one mark of discipleship which the Master laid down: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." The world holds aloof from the Church, not because the world is wholly lacking in the religious spirit and temper, but because that distinguishing note of love is wanting in Christ's professed people, and the world has well-nigh lost respect for the Church on that account.

We have made great advances towards Christian unity in the Churches which we call Free. Thank God for that! The old furnace of love is beginning to burn again with heavenly fervour there. But still we are confronted by the sad fact which recent religious censuses have revealed, that while five-sixths of the people in this land remain outside every church, the professed Christians are about equally divided into two camps which have no communion

with each other, which often even show an undisguised hostility to each other as embittered as that which separated ancient Jew from Samaritan. It is that terrible rent in the Lord's host that exposes it to the scoff of the unbeliever and half-paralyses its witnessing force. We all know it, and grieve over it. The greatest and best minds in the Anglican Church humble themselves over it as sadly and earnestly as the best among ourselves. Men like Canon Henson (would that they could be multiplied by thousands!) weep rivers of tears over the exclusiveness of their own Church and its refusal to recognise in brotherly love the Christians working by its side. And that leaven of nobler charity, happily, is spreading everywhere. When the Churches learn to clasp hands, to forget their hierarchies and offices and separating dogmas in the one sweet Masterhood of Jesus; when they love each other as He loved them, and in the uplifting of His adorable name form one united and sympathetic army; the battle will be carried on with results surpassing all hopes, and the kingdom of God will not be long delayed.

And every single church must be charged with the spirit of this new commandment before it can be an attractive force in that sphere where its witness is borne. You ask why the people do not come to church, and you get fifty different answers, some of them stupid, some of them utterly false, and some perhaps half true. The attendance at our sanctuaries is diminishing, though the religious sentiment is

more widely diffused among the people than ever. There is a more genuine interest in every great religious question. There is less avowed scepticism to-day than we have ever known in the course of our lives. And yet the Church is losing its attractiveness. How do you account for it?

The most common explanation attributes it to the preacher and the minister. That is a cheap way out of it. It is so easy to make him a scapegoat for a whole church's sins. Besides, it is not true. Any preacher who has the least persuasive power and prophetic gift can go to a music-hall or theatre, and pack it with a crowd of non-churchgoers, by the simple preaching of the gospel, when probably his own sanctuary is only half filled. It is the church they will not come to. And that suggests many heart-searching questions. It ought to bring us *all* to our knees, and not simply the minister. Possibly the solution of the problem would be found in these words of Jesus. Have our churches the true mark of discipleship? Are they beautiful and attractive because the spirit of love rules and abounds there. No dissensions there, no parties, no anger or bitterness or malice, no thought of each other, or speech concerning each other, save of kindness and pure affection. Where a church can show these proofs of its calling, it will never call to the world around in vain. And without these things, we have no claim to be His disciples at all. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."



CHRIST'S ATTRACTION FOR THE  
SINFUL

By JOHN C. LAMBERT, D.D.



## CHRIST'S ATTRACTION FOR THE SINFUL

"And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples."—MATTHEW ix. 10.

Is it not very striking to observe the attraction that our Lord appears to have exercised in the days of His flesh, over sinful men and women? Jesus was sinless, and being sinless, He possessed that mysterious power which belongs to pure souls, of detecting the presence of sin in the souls of other men. For one who is really pure in heart not only sees God, but may be said to see other men with God's eyes. Among the men and women whom he meets, he knows by a kind of intuition who of them is clean-hearted and who is not. Like some sensitive plant of the moral world, he shrinks instinctively from the rude touch of sin. Well, Jesus had this power in the highest degree, for He was, what no other man has ever been—absolutely sinless. And so He knew a heart at a glance, reading it through and through. He detected the evil that lurked under a righteous exterior; He perceived the

festering rottenness that lay within the decent white-washed sepulchre ; He felt the bad motive concealed behind the apparently natural and plausible question or remark. The Gospels give us numberless illustrations of His possession of this power.

Now, commonly, there is no attraction between the good man and the sinner ; rather there tends to be a mutual repulsion between them. Put a man who has a high reputation for purity of soul and a man of a very low character in a room by themselves, or shut them up together in the same railway carriage on a long journey, and the probability is that they will both feel rather uncomfortable. The good man feels as if his goodness were in danger of being contaminated ; the bad man feels as if his badness ran the risk of being reprovèd. But our Lord Jesus was absolutely sinless ; and yet we see how sinners came flocking to His feet.

He saw a publican named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and said to him, "Follow Me !" and he arose, and left all, and followed Jesus. He saw another publican named Zacchæus, who had the reputation of being a sinner, and seems to have quite deserved his reputation, looking curiously down upon Him through the leaves of a sycamore tree ; and when Jesus said to him, "To-day I must abide at thy house," Zacchæus was overwhelmed with joy. Once, as He sat at meat at the table of a Pharisee, "a woman which was in the city, a sinner," came in and stole silently behind Him. That was a house

where the finger of scorn was certain to be pointed at her. But nothing of this does she heed. She stands at His feet behind Him, weeping; and when some of her great hot tears fell plashing down upon the Saviour's dust-stained feet, half-frightened to see what had happened, she took her long, loose tresses and wiped the tears away; and then she kissed the Master's feet, and anointed them with precious ointment that she had brought for this very purpose. And once more in our text we read that it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, *many* publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

Now all this was very strange. The enemies of Jesus certainly felt it to be so. Here was a man who had a great reputation for holiness, and yet He seemed to have some sort of affinity for these wicked people. They did not know what to make of it at all. But at last a happy idea struck them. They bethought them of some of those stale proverbs which so often serve us as an easy and convenient means of taking the measure of anyone or anything we do not understand. "Like cleaves to like," they said; "Birds of a feather stick together." And so at last they were prepared to cry out, as they pointed their fingers at Jesus, "Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

Well, brethren, those Pharisees were so far right. Jesus *was* the friend of publicans and sinners. But we cannot accept their blind explanation of this

strange friendship. Jesus, we know full well, was no glutton or wine-bibber. We must seek elsewhere for the reasons why He was so attractive to the sinful ; and we may spend a little time this morning in trying to discover what some of those reasons were.

### I.

**In the first place, we may say, the very sinlessness of Jesus drew those sinners after Him.**

It may seem a contradiction to assign this as a reason, for have we not just said that there is a natural repulsion between the holy and the sinful? Yes, that is perfectly true. In so far as anyone is ruled by his sin, holiness must ever repel him. If, then, there were no soul of goodness in an evil heart, that heart could never be attracted by the vision of a sinless life. But, thank God! there is no man or woman, however sinful, that has sunk so low as this. Hardly could it be said of any human being living upon earth, that he or she has taken as the sole motto of existence the words that Milton puts into Satan's mouth :

"All good to me is lost.  
Evil, be thou my good."

Brethren, there is something godlike in every human creature, however stained and defiled with

sin. There are still lingering traces of that image of God which is the true archetype of the souls that God has made. There is something that responds to that perfect holiness which pertains to the nature of our Father in heaven. And so every heart is affected, less or more, by the sight of a living purity—even the hearts of those who are most deeply sunk and degraded. Let us never think that any of our fellows is beyond the reach of such feelings as these. In every one of them there is some spark of goodness, however dim, that may yet by God's grace be fanned into a flame. Indeed, is it not sometimes the case that it is just those that have fallen farthest who were possessed by nature of the finest qualities: their very gifts and graces—their talents, their generosity of heart, the warmth of their social affections—have made them more liable to temptation. And without doubt it was the buried potentialities of goodness in the souls of those poor sinners that drew them near to Jesus. The sight of His purity reminded them of the innocence of their own childhood, of what they once were, of what they might have been, of what even yet they longed to be.

But it was not only the harmonious music of Christ's beautiful life stirring a faint but sweet response from some inner chord that had long been silent—it was not this only that drew sinners after Him, as the wild beasts of the forest, and even the trees and rocks of Olympus, are said to have been drawn by the lyre of Orpheus. It was also

that *positive* power of true sinlessness to which I have alluded—the power of detecting the presence of sin in the hearts of other men. Those sinners must have felt that Jesus, just because of His purity, knew better than others how sinful they were. And yet this consciousness did not make them flee from His approach; nay, this also was part of the subtle influence that drew them to Him. For in every heart, side by side with a desire to conceal sin, there lies a still deeper desire to confess it. Have you not felt that desire? Have you not cried at times, as you thought of your hidden secret, “My burden is heavier than I can bear?” Have you not longed for some human friend so wise and patient, so strong-hearted and pure, that you could pour out all your guilt into his listening ears? Believe me, those sinners of our text knew something of this same feeling; and this also was an influence that drew them to Jesus. For just as a portrait by some great artist seems to follow us with its eyes wherever we move about the room, and almost to read our thoughts with a kind of secret intelligence, so the perfect life of Jesus was not only beautiful to look upon, but inspired the belief that He had the power of gazing into the hearts of those around Him. Thus the sinlessness of Jesus exercised a kind of fascination over the sinful. To stand in that gracious presence was itself a confession. No words were needed, but those who stood before Him were sure that He knew everything. And what a relief it was, as that poor

woman of the city felt, simply to cast oneself down in silence before this Being of spotless purity, and to shed one's speechless tears at Jesus' feet.

## II.

**But besides the sinlessness of Jesus, another quality that drew the sinful to Him was His sympathy.**

I have said that, in general, good men and bad men are mutually repelled from each other; and the reason of this is that there is no real sympathy between them. A good man commonly finds it hard to distinguish between the sinner and the sin. He has learned to hate sin, and how difficult it is to discriminate a man from his deeds, and to love the person even while you continue to detest what he has done. But Jesus had the profoundest sympathy with fallen and degraded men and women, and He showed this sympathy in every look and word. He had the pity and concern of the true Shepherd for the sheep that was lost. With all His immaculate goodness, there was nothing in Him of that attitude of self-conscious righteousness which seems to say, "Stand off! for I am holier than thou." That is the attitude we are generally prone to take towards those whom we consider much worse persons than ourselves. For when ordinary men, by much struggling and after many a stumble and many a

bruise, have climbed some little way up the steep heights of the mountain of God's holiness, they are very apt in their hearts to look down upon those who are still beneath them in the valleys of sin and shame. And when with much effort they have succeeded in washing some stains out of their filthy garments, how ready they are to shrink back from those who are viler than themselves, through fear that their new-washed raiment may again be soiled. But a strong and living purity does not need to shrink from contact with the impure. It is too unconscious to be proud, too unselfish to dread contamination. Like the sweet sunlight, it can shed itself upon the very mire of the streets and yet suffer no shadow of defilement. Now to Jesus Christ there belonged a goodness so perfect and so positive that it left abundance of room in His heart for sympathy with the sinful. Not that He judged their sin leniently; He could not do so, for He hated sin with the hatred of God Himself. And yet He never judged the sinner harshly, since He loved him and pitied him and desired to save him, even while condemning him for what he had done. And it was this wonderful combination in Jesus of a perfect purity with a profound sympathy that helps to explain the secret of His attraction for publicans and sinners.

## III.

**But in addition to the sinlessness and the sympathy of Jesus Christ, there was another and yet deeper reason for that attraction of which we are thinking, and that was that He claimed and exercised the power to forgive sins.**

Sympathy by itself, brethren, is not enough to satisfy a conscious sinner. Sympathy, after all, goes a very short way in such a case. It cannot atone for the past. It cannot blot out the black record of the accusing years, or hush the voice of an awakened conscience. What a sinful man really desires is forgiveness—not the sympathy of his fellow-sinners, but the assurance that the God of holiness has blotted out his transgressions and pardoned the iniquity of his sin. Now Jesus, as we know, assumed the right and power of forgiveness; and what a hold that would give Him upon the hearts of sin-laden folk. See how the Roman Catholic Church was able to throw its spell over the nations for centuries by means of its false doctrine of a priestly power to absolve men from their sins. Well, Jesus claimed and wielded this high power of absolution, and convinced those to whom He spake the absolving words of His divine right to do so. Those publicans and sinners, of course, did not know the full truth of

His Divinity. But they did feel that this man was pure and holy—so pure and holy that His words fell upon their hearts as if falling from the lips of God Himself. And what a thrill of joy and peace and everlasting hope must have shot through a sinful breast when, from the mouth of this sinless One, who claimed that He, the Son of Man, had power on earth to forgive sins, there came the declaration of a forgiveness unbounded and Divine: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

#### IV.

**But there was still another secret of the attraction which Jesus exercised over those publicans and sinners.**

They felt, I have said, the fascination of His purity. They were touched by that sympathy which loved them even while fully aware what manner of persons they were. There was an exquisite joy in the thought of being forgiven by One who had authority to forgive. But what about the days to come? That is always a thought to give the best and strongest pause. What must it be to those who know that they are very sinful and weak? Oh! it must ever be a dreary thing when a man looks out upon a gloomy wilderness through

which he has to pass, knowing that there he is sure to be tempted of the devil, remembering too that all the evil instincts and habits and passions of his former days are still alive within him. If Jesus had not given those sinners who were drawn to Him some *vital power for the future*, as well as sympathy for the present and forgiveness for the past, their coming to Him would have been little more than a transient gleam of sunshine in their bleak and cloudy lives. But this also Jesus did. This also was why He was so attractive to them. I have said that the sight of His purity awakened in their hearts sweet and yet sad thoughts of what might have been; but Jesus turned such thoughts into hopes and aspirations after what even yet might be. For Jesus Himself, the Person of Jesus, this Son of Man who was so pure and loving and forgiving, filled the souls of those men and women with a mighty constraining love that became a new force in their experience, in the consciousness of which the world appeared no longer as a wilderness in which they were sure to stumble, but as a battlefield on which they were certain to conquer.

See how Matthew the publican obeyed the call of Jesus, leaving all to follow Him. There was no hesitation, no faltering, no struggle. Love to the Lord Jesus Christ made everything easy.

See how Zacchæus of Jericho, so greedy and grasping as he had been, tears up at once by the roots the weeds of error and selfishness and sin that

had been growing so thickly in his heart. The half of his goods he gives away to feed the poor, and to those whom he had robbed makes fourfold restoration.

See how Mary Magdalene, out of whom seven devils had been cast, sits clothed and in her right mind at Jesus' feet; how she follows Him to the Cross when His own apostles have fled, and goes to the Sepulchre early in the morning, while it is yet dark, and before even the beloved disciple has thought of visiting his Master's grave. See how, when all others have departed from that empty tomb, *she* cannot leave it, but stands without in the Garden weeping, because they have taken away her Lord, and she knows not where they have laid Him. Behold how she loved Him! "For to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much"; and it was, above all, a deep, constraining, personal love, a love full of spiritual potencies for the future, that drew forgiven sinners to the feet of Jesus, and kept them lingering there.

We have been thinking of the reasons why Jesus, when He was on earth, was so attractive to the sinful. Let us remember that, *for those same reasons, Jesus is attractive still*. Who is there among us that has not felt at times the weary yoke of sin, that has not longed for deliverance from self, and for power to live a purer, larger, fuller life? To whom can we go but unto Jesus? His purity will quicken our longings to be pure. His sympathy will

comfort us. His grace will pardon and cleanse. And then the greatness of His love and of all His unspeakable gifts will beget in us the "much love" of those who are much forgiven. The love of Christ, as St Paul says, will constrain us, and make new creatures of us, so that we shall no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who for our sakes died and rose again.



# A NEW CREATION

By G. CURRIE MARTIN, M.A., B.D.



## A NEW CREATION

“Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation : the old things are passed away ; behold they are become new.”—2 COR. v. 17.

THE word “wherefore,” with which the text begins, shows us that the words stand in close connection with what precedes them, and that in order to understand their meaning, we must know what is the argument that leads up to them. The apostle has been dealing with one of his favourite themes—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he has been arguing, as he often does, that that death upon the cross was not an end in itself, but the necessary step toward the resurrection, and that the new life which was manifested in that wonderful victory over the grave, was to be imparted to all who, through faith in Him, partook in the same experience. But, to the mind of Paul, this did not only mean that literal death was to be succeeded by a literal resurrection, but that, here and now, in the life men live in the flesh, the whole drama of the cross and of the open grave was destined to be re-enacted, and that a death to sin might mean for

any man who sought it, a resurrection to righteousness. For the apostle one great effect of the resurrection of Christ was that it set free in the world a new and hitherto undreamed-of power, the power whereby, if belief made a man one with Christ, the greatest marvel might be accomplished, and all that man's past be forgotten in a new and wonderfully altered present. And so he reaches the words we have here to consider, in which he terms such a change nothing less than a "new creation."

## I.

**Let us consider, then, in the first place, the significance of the new creation.**

There is a sense in which we are all accustomed to employ the idea in common speech. Suppose a man has been very ill, and, on his recovery, he meets someone with whom he is discussing the experiences of his sickness and the joy of his recovery. He is very likely to say, "I feel a new man, better than ever I was in my life." The man is the same, but the inflowing of health that has resulted from his convalescence, and as the effect of his physician's treatment, causes him to consider the transition from his days of weakness and suffering as something so wonderful as to amount to a re-creation of his whole nature. But even more truly is this the case when the experience is that of the inward life. We

are told that when Jenny Lind, the famous vocalist, suddenly discovered her powers as a singer, it perfectly transformed her whole outlook upon life. In her own words, she has described the day of the discovery thus: "I got up that morning one creature, I went to bed another creature. I had found my power." "On that day," remarks her biographer, "she woke to herself, she became artistically alive; she felt the inspiration and won the sway which she now felt it was hers to have and to hold. It was a step out into a new world of dominion." These last words seem perfectly to express what is meant even in the higher realm of the spiritual. With an amazement that surpasses belief does a man realise the strange and new powers that are latent within him, when he passes from the thralldom of sin into the marvellous liberty of Jesus Christ. Paul himself had known it. From the persecutor on the way to Damascus, he became, in a few brief hours, the preacher of the faith of which he had formerly made havoc. "The life," he says, "I now live in the flesh, I live by faith, the faith that is in the Son of God." This power of Christ lays hold of the life, cleansing, sweetening, refreshing it, and making it fruitful, like the great river of the soul, as it is pictured by the poet:

"East the forefront of habitations holy  
Gleamed to Engedi, shone to Eneglaim,  
Softly thereout, and from thereunder slowly  
Wandered the waters, and delaying, came.

"Then the great stream, which having seen he showeth,  
Hid from the wise, but manifest to him,  
Flowed and arose, as when Euphrates floweth,  
Rose from the ankles till a man might swim.

"Even with so soft a surge and an increasing,  
Drunk of the sand, and thwarted of the clod,  
Stilled and astir, and checked and never ceasing,  
Spreadeth the great wave of the grace of God.

"Bears to the marishes and bitter places  
Healing for hurt, and for their poisons, balm,  
Isle after isle in infinite embraces  
Floods and enfolds and fringes with the palm."

The true significance of the change is, therefore, not only felt by the life that experiences it, but is realised also by all those with whom that life comes into contact, so that in the new and spiritual creation, as in the older and physical one, the life that is originated becomes itself the origin of new and ever-increasing life, growing in strength and power and loveliness, till its evolution culminates in the perfection of the God who called it into being.

## II.

**The second point these words suggest to us is that of the suddenness of the new creation.**

Men say sometimes that they have no belief in sudden conversions, but, if we apprehend truly the meaning of conversion, it must be sudden. The knowledge of it may not come suddenly, but the

fact itself is bound from its very nature to be sudden. It is a crisis of the soul, and all crises are momentary. When a patient is suffering from some severe fever, the physician may only be able to say at one time, "The crisis is not yet reached," and some hours later, "The crisis is now passed"; but the crisis itself, the passing from sickness to convalescence, the conquest of strength over weakness, must have been the matter of a moment, had human skill been able to note it. The wave of new life rushes in unnoticed, and only by its later presence is one able to tell that it has arrived. Those who find it are often like watchers by some lonely and far-stretching beach, who wait the turn of the tide, but miss the moment of its flow, and only discover that the ebb has ceased, and the flood-tide begun, by the presence of the flowing sea in the distant channels of the sand :

"For, while the tired waves, vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main ;

"And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light,  
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright."

It happens sometimes to the voyager who is approaching the coast-line which is not yet visible, that he suddenly discovers the water round the ship to be of a different colour, and in looking back can see the clear line of demarcation between the deep ocean and

the water in which he is now sailing, and learns that he is within the mouth of an estuary, and that the water is discoloured by the great river that flows thus far into the sea. He is within the river's mouth before he knows it, but at a certain moment of the voyage he had crossed the line. Or, once more, in climbing a long and lofty range of hills the traveller may be uncertain whether on what appears to be a dreary level he has crossed the watershed or not, until he suddenly discovers that the streams are running in the opposite direction from those he has hitherto followed, and so becomes aware that the summit of the pass has been crossed. Just so is it with the great transition of the spiritual life, and that note of surprise that we have seen in each of our illustrations from the physical world is only more markedly present in this record of the spiritual world. "Behold, all things are become new," is the utterance of the apostle, and we feel certain that the splendour of surprise that was felt in his own heart when the great experience of Christ's renewing power came to him at Damascus, is echoed in the words he here writes to the Corinthians. And that note of surprise is the hall-mark of every genuine conversion.

Perhaps few more interesting illustrations of the truth can be found in recent times than in the pages of Mr F. H. Bullen's autobiography, where, after telling the story of his own conversion one evening in a colonial mission-hall, he thus proceeds with the

narrative of the next day's work: "Returning to work next morning, I was surprised to find how easily everything went. Orders had been given to clean and paint the ship inside and out, and at a job like this, with energetic officers, a great deal of hard work is done with its usual concomitant of blasphemous growling. But I had no desire to growl. It seemed the easiest thing in the world to be willing and obedient, to do everything that was given me to do with the utmost care, and endeavour to make the job as perfect as I was able. Then, when breakfast-time came, after carrying in the food, instead of rushing upon my share, I felt inclined to wash, a thing which excited several derisive remarks at so unusual a proceeding. I felt myself a quiet wonder at this impulse, but obeyed it, sitting down afterwards to my unsavoury meal with a fervent 'Thank God,' another impulse for which I could not account. Also I found that for the first time for several years I had not used a single oath all day. And I remembered the many occasions when I had, with many tears, bound myself with the strongest vows possible to cease from swearing, and had always failed lamentably. Yet to-day, without an effort on my part, without giving the matter a moment's thought, I had found my tongue holden."

This feeling of wonder can never be absent from any who have realised the marvellous truth of the change that Christ works from within upon the heart. For it must always be remembered that, as

Dr Jowett phrased it, He does not "carve and polish human nature with a graving tool, but re-makes the whole man; first pouring out his soul before God, and then casting him in a mould."

### III.

**The last point that the text suggests to us is the permanence of the new creation.**

One great feature of the earlier creation, according to the New Testament writers, is that it is destined to pass away. Even its seemingly most permanent elements, the mountains and rocks, are eventually to be "melted with fervent heat, and the heavens to be rolled up like a scroll." We are indeed told by Paul, as well as by the author of the Fourth Gospel, that the universe was created in and through Christ. But the new creation is in special manner His own work, and partakes His characteristics. There is no destruction possible here. As well might one speak of Christ Himself passing away as of the transiency of that new creature whom He has formed in the hearts of His disciples. Those who have been so re-created are citizens of a city that itself is eternal, and this eternal citizenship carries with it the right and certainty of abiding as the city itself will abide.

In Dr Abbott's most recent and entrancing volume, he tells the story of a Christian of the second century who was a devoted student under

Epictetus. Into his hands there came the epistles of Paul, and these answered questions that his philosophic tutor had been unable to solve, though he had raised them in the mind of his pupil. In a wonderfully realistic manner, we are enabled to understand how gradually there dawns upon the mind of this young Roman philosopher the meaning of the new faith, and nowhere is the story told with greater effect than when he, for the first time, meets the conception of the new creation. Let me quote to you the words that form his comment, not, indeed, upon this passage, but upon the similar passage in the Philippian letter. "These last words made me understand how Paul might have regarded Christ as manifested *in* him rather than *to* him. Isaiah saw God uplifted on high *outside* him. But Paul felt the Son of God enthroned as sovereign *within* him." I remembered reading in some drama how the wife of a dethroned and submissive sovereign goads him to rebel against his successor, saying:

"Hath he deposed  
Thine intellect? Hath he been *in thy heart*?"

This was just what Paul experienced, and exulted in avowing. Christ had "deposed" Paul's former self, and substituted a new self of His own as viceroy, to rule Paul, "in his heart." A soldier might say that Christ, in the moment of taking Paul prisoner, had (so to speak) given him back his sword, saying, "Use it on my side among all the nations of the

earth, that they also may receive the good tidings of the forgiveness of sins." But in fact (according to Paul's view), Christ had done much more than this. He had given Paul a new sword, the sword of the Spirit. He had also made his whole nature anew, according to Paul's own saying, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; behold all things are become new."

The element of permanence is secured by the indwelling of Christ within our hearts in accordance with His own saying, "Abide in Me, and I in you." By the strange marvel of the Divine grace we are made one with Him, not only in the will to obey, but in the power of obedience, and this it is which inspires the Christian hope and makes possible the Christian accomplishment. It has been well said of this passage that it is "the apostle's profoundest word, not on the gospel, but on the appropriation of the gospel; not on Christ, but on the Christian religion." The words do indeed contain the most supreme and satisfactory secret of the Christian faith, denoting, as they do, the power whereby the individual life may become transformed into the likeness of the life of Christ, but also the power whereby the world itself may become a new world, whereby we, the agents in that new creation, may be permitted by our Lord to have a share in His own great creative work.

It is in these words, then, that the Christian Church should find the greatest incentive for all aggressive

work at home and abroad. When we enter upon missionary service, it is not like soldiers setting out on a forlorn hope and venturing upon the desperate enterprise with only a remote chance of success, but it is like the well-equipped army setting forth upon a campaign, the whole of which has been sketched for them by a master-mind, while the same hand that has sketched the outline is itself moved by the master-heart of courage and victorious certainty guiding them to the accomplishment of their task. And whether we look at the individual or at the community, is it too much to say that the power of Christ actually brings to pass a new creation? Take the Fiji Islands as an example, which, within a single generation, passed from the grossest heathenism to an apprehension and practice of Christianity that surpassed the form of the faith found in many lands after centuries of discipline. Or, take the change experienced in some human life, an example of which must be known to almost everyone amongst us, and say whether any power other than that of a creative will could have brought about such results. Surely here, then, we may feel our call to continued and unstinted service. The many problems that press upon us in the social conditions of our own land and the still prevalent heathenism of so many nations of the earth will all find their solution in the faith that seeks to make all men conversant with the power and reality of the new creative force of the Divine Spirit.

And, finally, for each of us the question remains: Have I felt this force? Have I experienced this change? Has the creative breath of the new life passed over my heart, so that I am no longer living the old life that is worse than death in its powerlessness to respond to high ideals, to accomplish permanent tasks, to enrich the world with nobler purposes? And, if not, shall we not seek with eagerness, with hopefulness, with strong and confident faith, the gift from God's hand of that renewing Spirit, whom to receive is to be born "not of the will of man but of God," and to become a new and imperishable creation?

THE KEYS OF DEATH AND OF  
HADES

By T. H. DARLOW, M.A.



## THE KEYS OF DEATH AND OF HADES

“Fear not : I am the first and the last, and the Living One ; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”—REVELATION i. 17, 18.

WHEN the sun set on the first Good Friday, it seemed as though the mission of Jesus Christ had collapsed into ruin. When His disciples, who watched Him die, rolled a great stone over the tomb where they had buried Him out of sight, they must have repeated one to another His last words : “ It is finished ”—yes, finished in disaster and despair. Faith and hope were crucified together with Christ, they died with Him, and they were buried in the same sepulchre ; and if He had never risen, faith and hope must have lain there still in the dust. The Church and its Founder expired together, and together they came back from the dead—whereof we are the witnesses, and not we only, but all the generations of the Church of God.

The life and continuance of the Christian Church are the grandest of all proofs that the Lord is risen indeed. The characteristic institutions of the

Church are hall-marked with this same token. Take Baptism, for instance. St Paul saw in Baptism, in its primitive form, an emblem of the death and the resurrection of Christ. "Ye are buried with Him," he says, "in the plunge under the chill water of the baptismal bath, and ye rise up into a new life after the example of His rising from the dead." Take the Lord's Supper. That was never the picturesque memorial of a departed Friend: it was the realisation of His spiritual presence, the communion with One who is alive for evermore.

As another example, consider the institution of Sunday. We look upon Sunday as part and parcel of the natural order of things. It comes round like seed-time and harvest, like darkness and day. We toil through our weekly task in prospect of our weekly festival. Many a man feels that were it not for Sunday, he must drop out of the struggle; but this one day revives and restores him in body and brain and heart. And yet Sunday is simply a Christian institution, a witness to the Christian creed, a creation of the Christian Church. It grew into being and came to be observed, just because on the first day of the week the faithful met to celebrate the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death and the grave. Christians keep Easter, not once a year only, but once a week—on the day when our Sun of Righteousness rose with healing in His wings. This is the day which the Lord hath made, which His servants have consecrated to the greatest

event that ever happened on earth. Sunday dates back in unbroken sequence to the garden of Joseph. The Sundays of the Church's life form one long chain of evidence that Christ is alive for evermore. Each Sunday is a recurring proof of the vacant cross and the empty sepulchre. Each Sunday preaches the Easter Gospel of the victory of everlasting love. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Sunday by Sunday we hear His voice, saying to us afresh: "I am the first and the last and the Living One; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore."

Not only the institutions of the Church, but its very perversions and corruptions bear their witness to the resurrection. You have read the story of the Crusades. You know how passionately the princes and nations of Christendom poured out their blood and treasure to win back Christ's tomb from the hands of the infidel. No doubt you have criticised the fanaticism of those pilgrim-soldiers. You have been shocked at the savage violence by which they succeeded, and disgusted at the jealous rivalries through which at last they failed. Perhaps, after all, it was as noble for Christian peoples to be rivals in the rescue of Palestine, seven or eight centuries ago, for the sake of an ideal, as it is for them to be rivals in the exploitation of Africa now for the sake of trade-profits. Be that as it may, this is the point of the problem. Where was that fierce faith born which launched the West crusading against the

East? How came men to care so much about the Holy Sepulchre? It was simply because they believed that Sepulchre to be an empty grave.

Yes, and the bitterness of His enemies as well as the adoration of His friends to-day, are an abiding proof that He is indeed the Living One. No martyred Socrates, no murdered Cæsar, excites such antipathy or stirs such resentment as Jesus Christ continually arouses in those who are the enemies of His Cross. Bad men would not hate Him and resist Him as they do, if He were not alive. And how could we love Him, how could we rest upon Him, as we do, if He were only a beautiful legend, only a shadowy ghost? The inward experience of Christians is the surest proof of Christ's resurrection. He could not be the First and the Last to our spirits, unless He were risen indeed. Every penitent soul whom He forgives and washes white, every tempted soul whom He fortifies with His grace, every humble soul in whom He manifests His presence, every troubled soul into whom He breathes the peace which is not of this world—they all belong to the great cloud of witnesses who affirm out of their deepest and most sacred experience that He is alive for evermore.

But leaving the fact of the resurrection, let us consider more closely what our Lord would teach us when He declares in this great metaphor, that He has "the keys of death and of Hades."

The book of the Revelation, in which the text

occurs, is filled with brightness, broken and blended with gloom. Little children and simple country-folk delight to dwell on its pictures of heaven. But the wisest scholars are perplexed when they try to interpret the dark symbols and mystic imagery which crowd across the prophet's vision of things to come. In these words, from the life of the risen Christ as He appeared to His servant John in the Spirit on the Lord's day, there seems to be a personification of the principalities and powers of the Unseen.

*Hades*, as our new version rightly reads, means of course the other world—not a place of torment, but simply the realm of spirits, the region beyond the grave. But *Death* is spoken of here, as elsewhere in Scripture, as though Death itself were a ghostly person and potentate. Death is represented to us, not just as the dark gateway that leads to Hades, but almost like the warder of that awful gate. Death here is the grisly guardian that bars the passage, the shadowy sentinel that stands to stop the way.

Again, this image of a key suggests, I think, two main ideas, though here both ideas are somewhat blended and pass into each other. A key involves (1) *the idea of solution or comprehension*, and (2) *the idea of conquest or mastery*.

## I.

**"The keys of death and of Hades" suggest the idea of comprehension.**

When you have the key to a puzzle or an enigma, you understand it. The key to a school-book is the solution of its problems or the translation of its hard sentences. And in this sense we sometimes say that sympathy is the key to understanding. When once you truly enter into any man's feelings, you have the clue to the labyrinth of his motives, you can follow the tangled maze of his conduct. A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, and wondrous wise as well. You can understand a man's behaviour, when you have yourself realised his position and stood, as it were, in his place. So that to have the *key* to any experience means to have entered into it and passed through it and endured it, and learned its secrets and made them your own.

It is true in this sense of Jesus Christ, that He has the keys of death and of Hades. He knows what dying is like, and He knows what comes after. By the grace of God He tasted death for every man. He Himself felt that fear of it which makes cowards of us all. He Himself shrank from it, as we do. He Himself endured it, as we must. He suffered far more than any other man ever did, or ever need suffer. Of all men He was most solitary and for-

saken. He trod the wine-press alone. He died, deserted, in the dark. He Himself gave up the ghost, and went down into a human grave. He was crucified, dead and buried, and He descended into Hades. That article in the Apostles' Creed stands, I suppose, to teach us that Christ's human nature was real and actual and permanent. We need not interpret it by any mediæval fancies about the harrowing of hell. It means that He shared our human experience to the uttermost. He went wherever we, in our turn, must go. He passed the mysterious gateway, and as Man He entered the unseen world, and all the secrets of that unutterable experience belong to Him.

We do not like to speak much, or even to think much, about our own dying. Yet, after all, dying must be, beyond comparison, the greatest event in each man's life. It is the supreme thing that can ever happen to us. It ought to be the consummation to which all our lives have been naturally leading up. Some one asked a holy man, in his last illness, how he looked forward to his departure. The answer was: "I have no shadow of fear; only an immense curiosity!" Have you never felt the same desire to solve for yourself the unspeakable secret? Have you never questioned what it will be like to cross the bar? Have you never shivered at the thought of setting out, solitary, into that unknown, lampless world? The awful part of dying is not the mere act and passage. What we dread in-

instinctively is to face a shapeless, formless void, to venture into the dark abyss, and to venture alone.

My brothers, Jesus Christ holds the keys of death and of Hades for you and for me. He has tasted death for you and me. We cannot fathom the mystery of our last mortal change. But He understands it perfectly, for He has endured it utterly; and He feels for us in our trembling, solitary fear. We know not the way we are going, but well do we know our Guide. He Himself has trodden every step of that Valley of the Shadow before us; and neither height nor depth shall be able to separate us from Him.

Sometimes we are tempted to ask idle and curious questions about things which lie beyond the veil. We know almost nothing; but we try, if it be possible, to peer through some cranny of the partition that severs us from the unseen. We listen—ah! how wistfully—for some echo out of the eternal silence to tell us of the state of the dead. But Jesus Christ holds the keys of that world in His own hand: He has not lent them to us, and it is not for us to be trying, as it were, to pick the lock. Enough for us, that He knows all that concerning which He bids us be content, awhile, to wait patiently in ignorance.

“Our knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
And we shall be with Him.”

## II.

**But further, a key implies more than mere comprehension: it carries as well the idea of conquest. It means not only sympathy, but mastery.**

Even schoolboys know that the key to the exercises, which they sometimes covet, is kept in the master's desk. We have read of the surrender of beleaguered cities. We remember, for example, how at the historic siege of Calais the chief citizens came out to carry the keys of their town to their English conqueror: the keys were the token of his victory.

Now in this sense also Christ holds the keys of death, and of what comes after death. Because He won them by conquest, because He is the King and Master of that world, as well as this. And His resurrection is represented to us as the proof and pledge of His victory. What His spiritual struggle was like, what His spiritual triumph involved, is beyond our ken. In the New Testament, death is spoken of as the enemy of mankind. Death is not merely the curse and consequence of evil, but its partner and its ally: so that these two stand and fall together. The sting of death, says the apostle, is sin. And the triumph of Christ over sin, was a triumph over death as well. As in His cross and passion, "He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," so "He hath abolished death, and brought life and

immortality to light through the Gospel." Surely nothing less than this is involved in the wonderful words which sum up the results of redemption: "He blotted out the bond that was against us, nailing it to His cross." "He hath made a show of the principalities and the powers, triumphing over them herein." "Since, then, the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same"—there is the perfect human sympathy—"that through death, He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"—there is the perfect Divine mastery over things present and things to come.

Again I say, we cannot grasp the full meaning of such thoughts as these: they are "thoughts that wander through eternity." Enough for us, that the Son of God has actually triumphed over all our ghostly enemies, of whatever shape. Enough for us, that death, named of old King of Terrors, has been subdued and conquered by the King of Love. Jesus Christ is Master of all the powers and provinces of the Unseen. When death comes to me, it will come as Christ's servant, to whom He will say, "Do this," and death shall only obey His will. And wherever death carries me, it cannot be outside Christ's dominion; "for to this end He both died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

I might go on to show you how this great truth of Christ's supremacy over death is the ground of our Christian sense of the awful sacredness of life. Take two instances of what I mean. We shrink in horror from the old Roman tolerance of suicide. We feel that self-murder is so wicked, that we hardly admit any sane man to be capable of the crime. But the ancient philosophers expressly justified it. Listen : "Do you like to be wretched? Then live on. Do you like it not? It is in your power to return whence you came: you may open to yourself a way to liberty by a single bodkin." Those are the words of Seneca, and Seneca was contemporary with St Paul. What made the difference, except Paul's belief in the resurrection? This is the faith which transformed the creed of suicide into the creed of martyrdom. And it is the same faith which makes Christians to-day shut their ears to the arguments of those who try to persuade us that when a man is hopelessly sick, we may, in mercy, put an end to his lingering pain. Go into a cancer-hospital, and ask yourself why we should let people die by inches in slow agony, instead of sending them to sleep at once. The only answer is, that Jesus Christ is the Master of life and death, and we dare not act as if we were masters ourselves. If we believe that He holds the keys of death and of Hades in His hand, we dare not try to snatch them from Him, before His own good time.

*The perfect human sympathy of Christ, the perfect Divine sovereignty of Christ ; both these are implied*

in the power of the mystic keys. Out of such high thoughts we learn our Easter lesson, and join its anthem, and kindle our hearts with its immortal hope. From all the change and decay which make our lives each year weaker and more weary ; from all the losses which leave us empty-hearted, bankrupt of love's treasure ; from all the disappointments which sadden us, the mistakes and the falls which make us ashamed : from the ambitions that flag and the desires that fail ; from the slackening pulses and fading colours and lengthening shadows of experience ; from all these tokens of dying we turn with firmer and simpler trust to cling anew to Him, our undying Saviour, whose voice still speaks every week His perpetual promise :

*I am the Resurrection and the Life. . . . Because I live, ye shall live also.*

# COADJUSTED PROVIDENCES

By THOMAS G. SELBY



## COADJUSTED PROVIDENCES

“And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose.”—ROMANS viii. 28.

MANY chapters in human life are blotted with tears, and offer dismal puzzles for the wit of the ingenious. There are men and women in the world who seem to have been fated from the beginning to ill-fortune, blighted happiness, and irreparable disaster. Chaos, confusion, bitter futility surround us, and times arrive when most of us have our experience of such things. Life is a tangle, and the ravelled threads are bare, shrinking, tormented nerves. No ready-made explanations of the theologian will fit all the problems which challenge us, but by affirming two or three foundation principles we may eliminate some of the difficulties. Many things, which God in His wisdom may see fit to allow, do not belong to the essential order of Providence, and He abhors them with an intense indignation, to which the most humane of us is a stranger. Much distress of both body and mind is caused by those who have not the love of God in them, or have not enough of it to make them

thoughtful. Much pain also exists to which the love of God, if kindled within the soul, would be a sweet and unfailing anodyne. Alas! that so many refuse the inward boon. A warp in character produces not a little distress and social disaster, and the warp sometimes leaves cardinal virtues unimpaired. The fortunes of not a few people who have everything in their favour can only be improved by an improvement in the personal temperament and habits of life. They have not to go far in search of tragedy, for tragedy is in their blood. And is it not thus with us in our relation to that Divine order which is laid deep in the courses of the world? Providence is not supposed to put us into possession of prosperity by the mere turning of the wheel, apart from the fitness to enjoy and improve our opportunities. The Bible nowhere asserts that God so coadjusts the manifold issues of life as to make them work good for the disobedient and the loveless. It is assumed by a certain school of scientific thinkers, who drop human responsibility from their reckonings, that a God worthy of the name ought to create conditions of universal pleasure and well-being, without taking account of moral factors, which are said to be more or less elusive and unreal. But God can put the resources of His government to better uses. It is no part of His plan to make the world a smooth, pleasant, flower-strewn place for those who are disaffected towards His holy laws. Providence often scourges offenders and seeks to bring them to better things

so long as any promise of amendment appears. It is true there is an indiscriminating good-will expressed in genial showers and all-gladdening sunshine, which are the common portion of good and evil men ; and for those who shall be heirs of salvation, but whose sonship is dormant, there are special and unseen ministries of Divine care and directing skill. But within the limits of this wider order established in the world there is a finer and more delicate providential sovereignty, which adjusts to each other every complex and discordant event in life and correlates the whole to the inner work of grace.

*In bringing to pass that which God accounts good, there must be two concurrent processes.* A shaping hand must be laid upon the many heterogeneous events which enter into our lives, converting them into means of blessing ; and within the soul the call of the Spirit must be heard, and the affections must warm with love to the all-directing and sovereign God.

# I.

**Through that providential hand which is laid upon the world, the things befalling us from time to time are controlled, overruled, and harmonised. The mischances and dislocations into which our life is plunged are corrected with incomparable skill.**

The methods of this great, unseen Providence

can only be judged by the combined and final effects which emerge from innumerable details in our appointed life. The strategy of a brilliant general cannot be judged by the temporary discomfort or harrowing experiences of any one man in the forces he is handling, nor indeed of any one regiment of men. One company is sent by a lowland route, and the men have to wade through swamps. Another has to skirt the shoulder of the hill and rush from bush to bush whilst under fire of the enemy. Another has to cross a strip of desert, and the men are forbidden to drink of the few foul pools they pass in their course, and their tongues swell with fierce thirst. It is a wretched campaign, judged from the standpoint of the gourmand or the sybarite. But the strategy is brilliant and successful. All the forces are made to converge by divergent pathways upon the one point where glory is won, and each man receives an unexpected recompense. By detached bits of our personal history, by isolated experiences, by the prospering tides which now and again come flooding into our life or leave it high and dry at the ebb, we cannot measure the counsels of Providence. Sometimes we speak of a stroke of good luck as providential. God's providence, however, is not to be studied in detached bits. It justifies itself by the broad issues brought to pass in the character and destiny.

Predestination, the idea of which colours the paragraph in which our text stands, is concerned

chiefly with the providential plan in the life of God's people. It is a term of military strategy, and describes the mapping out of impending events and their coadjustment and subordination to a Divine end. Lacking inward grace, we may frustrate the gracious strategy which orders the diverse forces in our life and shapes them to redemptive uses; or at least it is possible for us to put ourselves outside those beatitudes in which Providence issues. There must be an inward fitness enabling us to coadjust ourselves to the methods of an all-wise God. A drunken, disloyal group of soldiers, or a company lacking a staff competent to interpret the orders conveyed by new methods of telegraphy, might leave themselves outside the scheme in the brain of the commander who is making half-a-dozen regiments converge upon some important post. If we lack the love which nerves men to endure, the spiritual sensibility which enables them to hear and interpret the Divine call, we may put ourselves outside the joy and honour of victory, although we cannot finally defeat the purposes of God concerning others. We may ignore the appointed time, take the wrong turn through neglect, disobey the word, and deprive ourselves of that supreme good towards which God has been seeking to set our steps. What folly to blame the plan, if we have helped to make it void! No kind of Providence can bring moral beings to goals of gladness and power unless there be the meek and

teachable temper, and the supporting co-action of a character which daily renews itself into accord with God's will. Things will go very much amiss with us indeed, and nothing end as God would have it, if we are disobedient to the heavenly vision. "To them that love God . . . even to them that are called according to His purpose."

## II.

The clearness with which we can see traces of a benign Providence in our lives depends in no small degree upon the interpretation we give to the idea of "good"; and this in turn will be determined by the measure of love to God which pervades our view and actuates our conduct. And love to God cannot well arise within those to whom the call which leads to salvation has not come.

Paul speaks of a companion who had turned back from the work of evangelism because he had loved the present world. Now Paul and Demas had different ideas of "good," and this deviation of view would affect the clearness with which they could discern the guiding hand of Providence in their daily fortunes. Paul judged things from the standpoint of spiritual gain, but his unworthy companion from that of temporal prosperity. Demas could see the guiding and protecting angel when the lines

fell to him in pleasant places, and the obloquy attaching to the Christian profession did not become insufferable. Paul could see that presence in the midst of mobs, when he was toiling into the late night to earn his pittance as a weaver of tent cloths, when he was scourged with rods, in bitter and forlorn imprisonment. Demas doubtless looked upon the man who could rejoice in such a career as more or less of a fanatic. Perhaps the apostasy of Demas was not final. He may have retrieved himself at last. But he wanted to save himself from the fate which seemed likely to overtake the apostle, to live under rather more genial conditions, perhaps even to show his skill in money-making. We do not know whether Demas attained the success of which he was dreaming; probably not, for the man who changes a spiritual for a temporal vocation generally muddles himself into miserable failure; but we are sure of this,—the greater the success which rewarded his ambition, the more peevish and discontented he would grow. Paul was an incomparably happier man when led forth to death than Demas in the heyday of that prosperity after which he ran. The apostle had sources of satisfaction wanting to his old comrade, because he had a different way of looking at life, and he had a different way of looking at life because he was so vitally identified with Christ's kingdom that all its triumphs became his own. Grace had taught him to attach to the word "good" a meaning different

from that which commended itself to the judgment of Demas. He loved God and was obedient to the heavenly call, and this opened his eyes to a guiding and overruling presence to which the other man was blind.

It is said that some of the most richly mineralised lands of the earth lie close to the Arctic Circle, if not within it. From the farmer's standpoint such a country is worthless. No crops grow there, no fruit-trees flourish, no pasturage for the flocks thrives beneath the snow. But the mining engineer sees the hid treasure, and will perhaps give more for it than for any other strip of land on the planet. And the most priceless possibilities sometimes lie in the bleakest and most forbidding lives. The land of Canaan, upon which Providence smiles with matchless favour, may be drenched with mists, swept with winter storms, and entombed in square miles of snow.

Why should those only who love God be singled out as men able to profit through the perplexing, many-sided and slow-working providences of life? Because grace puts within them a principle which qualifies them to rise in the moral scale through all the disciplines of their lot, and inspires them through long years to trust in the benignity of the motives which dominate their appointed trials. The effect of suffering upon character is a subject of constant discussion. Unbelievers, Christian Scientists, and a certain school of Faith-healers are at one in declaring

that pain can have no good effect upon character, whilst others take an opposite side in the controversy. Ernest Renan has somewhere said "Suffering degrades, humiliates, and tends to blasphemy." Certain it is that a man who has not learned to love God cannot be flagellated into a becoming frame of mind through the agonies of disease, or driven to reverence by the shipwreck of his worldly hopes. In the apostle's assertion, guarded as it is by a rigid condition, we may find the key to the question. The suffering which makes one man a saint turns another into a fuming rebel. The issue is determined within the mind itself. The shadow alighting upon our pathway may be fraught with healing or breed intolerable torment.

How are the moral characteristics of various branches of the human family affected by the ordeals through which they have had to pass? The servitude of Egypt tended to bring the descendants of Abraham to a lower level than the patriarch had reached in his free wanderings. Races trampled down for centuries lose courage and resort to the arts of perfidy. The Jew has retained splendid virtues, but no one would venture to argue that he has gained by the baiting, ostracism, and "pogroms" of two thousand years. We often find him cynical, avaricious, unbelieving. By a regimen of fierce, unsparing autocracy, the Russian has been turned into a curious mixture of the terrorist and the winning, simple child. The oppression of man by his fellow-man scarcely ever improves

the disposition, because it is a defiance of natural rights and exasperates to madness. Perhaps David had this in mind when he chose to fall into the hand of the Lord rather than to receive chastisement from neighbouring nations. Suffering may endow the character with rare and wonderful attributes, or it may debase and poison it. It may refine and mellow the personality, or it may blight it into a standing menace to society. Some men become acrid and godless under the influence of adversity, whilst others grow gracious and spiritual; and the differentiating factor is within. Men cannot fail to gain by the hard experiences of life if they love God and are the called according to His purpose.

The Lord Jesus opened His ministry by proclaiming eight Beatitudes which were indissolubly wedded to specific qualities of character, and the kingdom of heaven itself would have been impossible apart from the high moral qualities gathered within it. Four out of the eight graces eulogised in the prelude to that discourse were passive, and developed under conditions of stress and humiliation. Every impeachment of Providence runs counter to the great Teacher's axioms, and makes light of those peculiar virtues which are produced by poverty, reproach, and persecution. Disbelief in the wisdom and benignity of those economies under which we are placed implies, either that chastisements do not usually produce virtues, or if they do, such uncertainty rests over the future life that virtue may possibly fail to

meet its just recompense. The waste of suffering is enormous if God ever subjects us to gratuitous pain and brings us into circumstances where it is impossible to acquire some new quality of character. Whatever event tends to call forth a more heroic element of goodness, which adds something to the sum of spiritual perfection, may be looked upon as belonging to a wise and gracious order. To gain in character is to gain in everything else, and he who abides in God's love cannot be permanently impoverished by the harsh and bitter experiences of the present life. If we have the root of love within us, the prunings and disciplines under which we quiver and bleed will increase our fruitfulness. But such an effect is impossible if we lack the holy passion which creates the temper of trustfulness in God and meek submission to His will. A poison-tree pruned for centuries will still produce that which is noxious according to its kind. The sharp edge of trial cannot develop benign fruitfulness in one who lacks the vital passion of love to God and obedience to His leadings.

### III.

**This temper of love makes the soul within which it glows plastic to the fine moulding touch of God's hand under the chequered and contrasted experiences of earth.**

It puts men into a reverent and submissive attitude

of mind, through which they can profit by the mysterious and manifold processes of which they are subjects. Those artists in hammered iron of the Middle Ages, who fashioned the lovely gates we see adorning the chancels and baptisteries of old churches, could not have done their work without the help of fire. If we were able to call back one of them into our midst and supplied him with the best of iron, the touch of hammer upon the cold metal would only shatter it into splinters. It must be white hot before it will respond to his delicate and skilful blows. Those silent, hydraulic pressures which are taking the place of clanging and deafening Nasmyth hammers in shaping steel to its industrial uses would be powerless if brought to bear upon the metal before it has been through the furnace. The nature must be made incandescent with the electric fires of love before it is amenable to the shaping touch of God. The difficulty some men feel in tracing the high moral effect of pain, arises from the fact that the kind of God believed in is not personal enough to invite love, and men see the furnace without seeing the infinite skill near by which is waiting to shape responsive souls into Divine standards of perfection. Indeed the present age has scant appreciation of those passive virtues which are often formed through the sharper disciplines of life. We cannot enter into God's thought of what is lovely and deserving praise, unless the indwelling spirit of love reconcile us to His holy perfections. The natural man inverts moral distinctions, and he

tests Providence not by its power to refine and exalt the character, but by the apparent good or ill fortune it brings. If you were to bring a man with that disorder of the tastes which sometimes occurs in insanity to the most delicate banquet ever prepared by human art, he would be the victim of nausea. He who cannot learn the secret of loving God would think himself in Purgatory if brought into a new heaven and earth filled with those peaceable fruits of righteousness which are yielded by the chastenings of the long centuries. Through pain and tears and much tribulation, God's counsels of perfection are steadily working themselves out in our lives, and, if we cannot discern His ends and enter into them, we shall be driven to distrust His methods. To those who love God the stress and conflict of each succeeding hour add something of value to the sum-total of final beatitude, because they add new qualities to the character.

#### IV.

**Adverse providences increase the privilege and high recompense of those who are rightly enriched and enlarged by their disciplines, for they increase a man's power of cheering and lifting up his woe-begone neighbours.**

Only those who love God are so engaged to the service of humanity that in becoming instruments of solace and encouragement to others they can find

compensation for their personal pain. The apostle speaks of "the God who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Unless a man has been driven by distress and oppression of spirit to the deepest springs of Divine solace, he cannot impart to others, who mourn in bitterness and from whose life all gladness has fled, the transcendent secret. Few are the wounds which a balm from on high cannot heal, and God has to train in a stern school the privileged physicians who are to be entrusted with His great remedies. It is perhaps within the compass of a reasonable hope that nine-tenths of the woes which harrow and devastate the weary world may be dispelled, and God works for this happy end by all the strange tribulations which vex the souls of his saints, whilst at the same time they store their natures with more responsive sympathies and a finer wisdom. No wrong, however deeply embedded in the structure of society, is inevitable when effectual ministries of help have been made ready through the chastenings of the saints. It is not in vain that the prophets have dreamed of a millennium in which all Nature shall find deliverance ; but that goal must be reached by a path of thorns, and the feet that have been washed for great ministries by an incomparably holy touch are the feet that must needs tread the steep of pain. We should rush through fire and water to the side of some sufferers

we know, if a sovereign and unfailing charm against physical pain had been put into our hands. God loves his children, for this has called forth their love to Him, and He wishes them to share in the glory of His Son who redeemed mankind from the curse, and they can only do this through those gifts of meekness, humility, patience, sympathy, which are evolved under conditions of pain. We get the best of life when, with the gracious memories of comforts we ourselves have received in days of tribulation, we can comfort others. The world would be far less inclined to impeach Divine providence, if those who love God would exercise towards others that uttermost power of succour with which they have been enriched through the sharp trials of the past.

## V.

**Those who love God draw their deepest satisfactions from His work, and if the troubles they endure contribute in any degree to the prosperity of that work, they are content, and feel that the best has been brought to pass.**

We find this aspect of the question illustrated in one of the pathetic incidents in Paul's closing life. He had become so joined to Christ, and so intimately identified with His cause, that the spread of the gospel added more to the sum of his inward joy than the privations of imprisonment took away from it.

Although no Stoic, he could forget, in the growing prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, the disgrace and discomfort awaiting him at Rome. Writing to the Philippians, he says: "The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel; . . . And therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." The gospel was now discussed in the quarters of the Imperial Guard, and in the very precincts of the palace, so that timid, shrinking disciples were receiving a new endowment of courage. It would have been impossible for Demas to write such a review of the situation and pour out his soul in jubilation. That was only possible to the man who loved God and had heard His call. The springs of gladness in a true servant of Jesus Christ are deepened and enlarged when through his patiently endured distress and humiliation the word of God is made to prevail. It vivifies with new interest and satisfaction his relation to the Lord. Love always teaches a man to live in others, and the love of God acts according to the same rule. The man whose life has been full of misadventures and disappointments finds the clouds break at eventide, when his children are reaching the shining goals of prosperity from which it was his fate to be debarred. When we love our children, however overcast our own lot, we rejoice in the distinctions they achieve in youth, early manhood and maturity, and their prizes are a sufficient offset to our pains and crosses. When spring-time and summer are gone, and

the mistral has blighted our best hopes, a glorious Indian summer comes to us as we watch the honour and prosperity that flow in upon those who are of our flesh and blood. If mutual love between parent and child is lost, such happiness is of course impossible to us. Love to God associates us with His kingdom and makes its victories our own. Failures and distresses are thus compensated, especially when they have been used to promote the honour of the Saviour and extend or strengthen His cause amongst men. The sowers who went forth in tears have an equal share with those who reap in the great consummation. We must not judge Providence and the ends towards which it mysteriously works from the worldling's standpoint; for, unless we love God, we cannot appreciate the results which ensue from His dealings.

## VI.

**The apostle indicates that it is the combined influence of diverse and manifold experiences which yields this highest good — "work together."**

We err gravely when we point to a rare coincidence or an unforeseen turn in our history and say, "This was the hand of God, and other happenings belong to a less sacred and romantic category." It is by the co-ordinated effect of common and uncommon, pleasant and adverse events upon

character, and upon the new surroundings which in due time will insphere character, that the ways of God's all-ruling providence must be justified. A fine balance establishes itself between the various forces which act upon us in our appointed spheres. God's plans of dealing with us are built up on some such lines as the physician's prescription. The master in therapeutics selects as the basis of his treatment a drug which has power to combat some morbid condition in a specific organ of the body or to quicken a flagging function :—a drug it may be which if recklessly administered would prove injurious, if not indeed fatal. But a powerful and priceless drug often brings its own dangers, so a corrective has to be put into the prescription to safeguard against the mischief with which it is attended. And then perhaps a reinforcement is added—a drug which acts in the same direction as the primary ingredient and intensifies its virtue. It is found that two elements which work in the same way have a cumulative power when their action is combined, beyond that which they possess apart. And in the same way God often produces greater results within the character He wants to rectify and make perfect, by conjoining various events and making them bring to pass a marked moral effect which they could not apart. And then the gracious correctives have to be brought in, so that the regime under which we are placed may not depress and destroy. The ingredients in the cup offered to us work together for good. We are

made humble, unworldly, brave-hearted, God-confiding, full of brotherly kindness, not by one event only which befalls us and has outstanding significance, but by a combined series. A fine balance must be preserved between the many factors which work in our lives. The high ecstasy and the thorn in the flesh are not far apart from each other. Compensations of exquisite tenderness follow disciplines which seem pitilessly severe. God comforted Paul by the coming of Titus, lest he should be swallowed up with excess of sorrow. A new vision of the Lord came to the apostle in his imprisonment when his friends had forsaken him. God wishes to keep us human and not to make us callous, impassive, hard-fibred. He combines into the methods of His providence incongruous elements, but all work together for good according to a skilful and unfailing plan.

## VII.

**The unseen Providence that works in the life of the elect people must be judged by the wholeness of its issues, and not by disjointed episodes; in the final realities to which it gives rise, and not in its passing phases.**

The most minute and unlikely things have their place in beautifying the character, and adding thereby to the final blessedness. We perplex

ourselves by bringing detached bits of individual history into the reckoning, and trying to fit them into a plan of our own. The different parts of the Swiss watches are made in different villages, according to a decimal scale, and standardised. A balance-wheel, escapement, or minute-hand, picked up by the wayside in one Canton, would fit into the works of a watch in another Canton; but a Prescott, Coventry, or Clerkenwell watchmaker who might find a lost packet of parts would meet with difficulty in making use of them in his own workshop at home. They are not standardised to his models and patterns. Do not let us be unduly surprised if we cannot fit all God's dealings with us into our own schemes of life. The works of Providence are standardised to eternal counsels that may be hidden from us, or be but dimly discerned. God's whole is not before us, and we are puzzled by the parts. The perfecting of His plans lies hidden in the folding shadows of the future.

In those terrible times of the Boxer rising, through which the missionaries in North China passed a few years ago, hundreds of blameless devoted lives perished at the hands of wolfish persecutors. Some of the messengers of the gospel in the disturbed districts escaped after incredible suffering and with all the chances against them; and they rightly spoke of the miraculous providences which vouchsafed to them hairbreadth escapes and raised up friends as they passed through the very jaws of

hell. But was there no Providence over those who in company with their wives and their little ones were cut down like sheep? The court of one mandarin ran with gutters of innocent blood. It is not the first time the question has arisen, for the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of some who were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain "a better resurrection." Upon a materialistic hypothesis, such problems are insoluble. In the early centuries the belief in the future life was so strong that martyrdom was accepted as a sign of providential favour, and Christians coveted the martyr's crown. Perhaps the enthusiasm of faith sometimes disturbed the perfect poise of the judgment; but we err in the other direction if we think these victims of the most awful of modern persecutions were not more highly favoured than their brethren who, by another pathway, found deliverance from the rage of the heathen. Those who suffered most were under God's protecting wings, and were perhaps folded more closely to His heart. Remember that God's providential ways are standardised, not to the conventions of earth, but to the eternal pattern. The man of unutterable grief is no outcast from the Divine tenderness. Give God room to fulfil His plans when they cannot be completed before your eyes. If the after-life is a dream, of course the doctrine of Providence is a wicked, glozing deceit, and every scene of suffering becomes the negation of God. But God's ways

can only be impugned when the doctrine of immortality has been expressly disproved.

### VIII.

**That we have heard God's call and been led to love Him, ought to be a sufficient assurance that our times are in His hands.**

Ministries of care and tenderness are about the feet of those who are yet to be heirs of salvation, although no proof of their spiritual birthright is yet set up. But the guiding presence and the all-sheltering wings are sensibly near to those whose hearts go out after that which is good. Love to God is the inward witness of a salvation revealed in part, and to be fully made known in the great day. The acts of an eternal Providence are co-ordinated with the processes of sanctification in the soul. If the heart is right with God, nothing can keep us out of our inheritance, and all things are ours, whether things present or things to come. The disciplines of life bring into view the hidden wealth of our inheritance, and teach us how to use it for the well-being of others and for our own sure blessedness. Every stage of life from which the directing and controlling presence of God withdraws itself becomes a deadly desert pilgrimage without an oasis; whilst the green pastures and the waters of refreshment, or at least a table of strength and

invigorating bounty in the wilderness, never fail the man who loves God and whom God continues to guide.

“Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”



CONFORMED OR TRANSFORMED

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## CONFORMED OR TRANSFORMED

“And be not conformed to this world ; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”—ROMANS xii. 2.

WHAT a mighty difference a single syllable makes ! —“conformed” and “transformed.” The words have a similarity in sound, and, up to a certain point, a resemblance in meaning. Each of them implies a change ; each of them means assuming another shape, another character. But the contrast is far greater than the likeness. One means a change which is wholly superficial, external, imitative ; the other is inward, deep, growing from the inner life to the outer. One is a copy, the other a creation. One is a moulding of soft material by surrounding forces, the other results from an energy within which pushes aside and breaks through all that shuts and cramps it in. A piece of dough or clay is conformed when you take it in your hands and deftly turn it into some other figure ; but a seed grain is transformed when by virtue of the life within it grows into a flower-bearing plant ; and the grub is transformed

when it passes through the chrysalis stage into a creature lovely as a rainbow. So a boy is conformed when he puts on the dress and apes the manner of a man, but he is transformed when the mind and soul within grow out of the careless jollity of youth into the seriousness and sober judgment of riper years.

One is little better than an unthinking, mechanical, half-automatic action, requiring no strength, no resisting power, no earnest will; the other is the action of a living, original, conquering force. In the one, man is like a plastic thing in the hands of a potter, who shapes it for base or worthy uses, just as he pleases. In the other, man is the temple of the Almighty Spirit, who shapes him slowly into His own thoughts and image. And the Christian life is throughout ruled by the nobler principle. It is the working and outcome of the deeper and diviner thing. "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." The apostle gives us here two injunctions, a negative and a positive, a sort of "thou shalt not" and "thou shalt."

## I.

**We are warned against the shaping which comes from without. "Be not conformed to this world."**

It was the world as Jesus had seen it, and as St Paul saw it; the world of hollow splendours

and gilded fashion, of corrupt minds and withered hearts, of unblushing licentiousness and hardly disguised knavery, a world of pride, envies, and painted hypocrisies; a world of religion without faith, of sensuality without love, of ambition without aspiration; a world in which outward refinement covered inward brutality, and civilisation was but veneer, and life had no dignity, reverence, or hope. Well might St Paul utter his urgent warning: "Be not conformed to this world." It was the one condition of the Christian life, that it should not yield to the forces which encompassed it like an atmosphere, but that it should develop independently by some Divine power in the inner man.

Our world is somewhat changed from that; yes, greatly changed. Its license is less licentious, its materialism less immoral, its selfishness less heartless, its civilisation more humane. Christian influences have coloured its thoughts, refined its habits, and elevated its ideals. Still, it is a world in which there is more of the flesh and the devil than of God, more of show than reality, more worship of sensuous things than spiritual, more pursuit of coarse material ends than striving for the higher and diviner life; and this word comes to us with scarcely weakened emphasis: "Be not conformed to this world." And no harder task is set the human heart and will. It requires ceaseless effort, watchfulness, and prayer, to resist the moulding influences of one's perpetual surroundings. It needs a power

greater than human forces can supply, a strength like that which fortified the saints, a faith like that which made apostles. Unless we are constantly warring against it by the cultivation of the inner life, our environment will master us. It will suggest our thoughts, colour our conceptions, rule our habits and actions. It is the natural tendency which needs the supernatural to counteract it. We go with the current unless something mightier than the current pulls us the other way. Our thoughts and judgments and modes of life fall like the molten metal from a furnace into moulds made ready for them, and inevitably take that shape unless some higher power catches them up before they fall and fashions them after a diviner pattern.

There are people who tell us that man is wholly made by his environment; that each human being is just the result of his training and circumstances; that his moral and religious condition is determined altogether by the accidents of his birth and be- settings; that we are honest and pure, pious and orthodox, or just the reverse, according to the sphere in which we have played our part, and the influences which have given us breath and nourishment; that, in fact, we are just pieces of plastic clay with no credit or discredit attaching for the shape we take. That notion is utterly immoral and demoralising. It is the excuse of the sluggish, the self-indulgent, and the wicked. It is a denial of will-power, of moral responsibility. It is a shutting out of God.

And yet it becomes true enough where the mind is indolent, where the heart has no earnest purpose, and where life is lived on easy terms.

We do conform, unless there is incessant and prayerful effort to pursue a nobler and more independent course. Conformity is easy. It is gliding softly with the stream. It calls for no moral resistance. To do as the great majority do, to think the thoughts of the average man, to follow the fashion of the day, to catch the fever which is in the air, to form our habits according to the pattern of our class or set, to be just as religious or irreligious as those among whom we move, to run after the pleasures and strive for the gains on which the great crowd about us sets its heart, to follow the common ambitions and drink in the common delights—all that needs no prayer, or self-repression, or soul energy of any kind. The veriest spiritual drowsiness is capable of this. One needs to have the spirit thoroughly awakened by God, to refuse conformity. For a young man to say, I will not live the life of the frivolous, pleasure-loving, God-forgetting youths about me; for a business man to say, I will follow no doubtful devices, however much they are the custom of the business world; for a woman to say, I will live for Christ, and not for the frivolities of the season; for a religious man to say, I will hold aloof from scenes where conscience would be offended, though the generality of the religious world pronounces them proper—I will not be content with

the species of religion which satisfies others; for any one to say, I will not be carried away by, and will not worship, the ordinary ambitions of the crowd; I will give my chief thought to the higher prizes of life—all that requires a brave heart, a will strengthened from above, a spirit disciplined and nerved by daily prayer and conscious walk with God. Those who do this are indeed God's elect. They are no more clay, but the strong men of the world, animated by the quenchless force and spirit of the Almighty, not moulded by the fashion of the world, but patterns and leaders that God gives to the world to shape it in better ways. Ah! we need to be stronger than the strong, we need to lay fast hold upon the heavenly power and love, if we are to carry out in any measure this injunction: "Be ye not conformed to this world."

## II.

**The positive order: "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."**

It is the very same word which is used of the transfiguration of our Lord. And therein lies the meaning of it. That glory which the disciples saw when they were with the beloved Master in the Mount came not *upon* Him but *out* of Him. The thin human covering which had darkened and

hidden the perfect beauty of the Divine soul within was for the moment made transparent, for a moment it was taken off as a garment, and the glory of His inner life was unveiled, revealed ; it shone upon His face and features and human form, and He stood transfigured before them. It took place in an instant ; it was exceptional and miraculous. Still, it was a lovely and expressive figure and type of the ordinary Christian life. That which took place swiftly, as a flash of thought, with our Lord, is to take place gradually with every one of those who receive His spirit, and are re-shaped by His mind and thought. "Be ye transformed," says the Apostle, "by the renewing of your mind." The outer life will change itself according to the changes of the spirit. The very face will become more and more a copy and index of the mind and heart ; and all that is outward will slowly assume a certain shining, corresponding to the shining beauty of the thoughts within.

For is it not very true in everyday life that the outward man, if carefully observed, is a sure index of the soul ? Sometimes you know what a man is by one glance at him ; and if we had a quicker perception we should always know. The facial lines are as a book in which the keen eyes would read all manner of hidden secrets. The miser has a peculiar type of face, hard, narrow, shrivelled like his own soul. The gambler cannot hide his vice ; it is written on every feature. The sensualist betrays

his guilty secret by the very motions of his lips and eyes. Passions and hatreds and lusts, however skilfully buried, worm their way to the surface and crawl over the face, leaving their traces there. A fair woman loses all her beauty if the heart entertains a long time evil tempers and ugly thoughts. Not suddenly—sometimes it takes years to bring about the correspondence between the face and the heart, but sooner or later the correspondence is made complete. And the plainest face becomes in time beautiful to look upon, as if some saint had passed by and left his reflection there, or as if the Master had thrown His own shadow there, if the heart within has entertained divine thoughts a long time and held secret fellowship with the Lord of life.

What is true of the face is true of the speech, of the actions—nay, of the whole outer world. All things change as our spirits change. The very world is narrowed down to the measure of our narrowing souls, broadened as our hearts are enlarged, beautiful or ugly, healthy or diseased, as our hearts are shaped by God or the depraving forces around us. St Paul goes to the root of the matter when he says, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."

And here we see the great difference between conformity and transformation. Conformity is the law of dead things, transformation is the law of life. Fill your mould with liquid metal, or gypsum, or

clay, or any other dead thing, and it will take just that shape; it has no power to break through its surroundings. But the living thing will refuse to be held down in this way. The living grows and expands, and when the shell or mould becomes too small it breaks through and comes forth to larger life. You put the seed in the ground, bury it deep, nay, heap stones upon it; it will conquer its circumstances, pierce through the soil, heave up the very rock, reach upward towards the light and make for itself a larger world. That is just the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. If there is no real faith and love and divine power in you, you will be held in and formed by your circumstances. You will just take the religious or the irreligious shape of your environment. You will never get above or beyond what others are doing or thinking around you. But if you have a living faith, an urgent love, if Christ has really given you some of His mind and spirit, you will want more room to serve Him. You will push down the barriers that cramp your energies, and your life, in spite of *all* things, will expand into noble and more Christlike forms.

Transformed and enlarged by the renewing of the mind. That is the law. Where Christ's mind is—where any part of His mind is—there is the development of the whole life into His likeness; into a larger, sweeter goodness; there do we live in His presence, and get a heavenly shape put upon our speech and actions; there do we measure all

things in the light of His views; there do we behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image from glory unto glory.

THE DIVINE PROMISES: A  
GREAT DEEP

BY W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.



## THE DIVINE PROMISES: A GREAT DEEP

“He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises ; that through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature.”—2 PETER i. 4.

PROMISES. Words of grace, assurances of mercy, the forms which eternal love assumes when it blossoms into words of hope and comfort for man. They stand in striking contrast to the threatenings. The revelation God has given to us contains both. Each are necessary for man's guidance and happiness ; the promises to inspire and satisfy, the threatenings to warn and deter. Divine promises, and therefore reliable : “God is not a man, that He should lie ; neither the son of man, that He should repent : hath He said, and shall He not do it ? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good ?” In order to buttress man in confidence and to rebuke his tendency to doubt, God has even sealed His promise with an oath that His word shall inevitably be fulfilled. He has sworn by Himself because He could swear by no greater, “that we might have strong encouragement.” The Divine promises are as

unchangeable as the Divine nature ; they are sealed to us by the blood of the everlasting covenant, and thus become a firm and unalterable foundation upon which man's faith can rest.

## I.

### **Consider the greatness of the promises.**

They cover the entire period of human life. They relate to man's infancy, his early childhood, his growing youth, his young manhood, his mature days, his old age. They never leave him until,

“ In age and feebleness extreme,  
He drops into eternity.”

The promises have regard to every need of human nature. All temporal blessings are secured by them to the believer. Through them blessings of food, clothing, home, money, and other mercies, in sufficient quantity or measure to bestow happiness, are ensured. The deeper wants of the soul are met by promises of purity, holiness, peace, joy, the guidance and companionship of the Holy Spirit, the enjoyment of unsearchable riches in Christ Jesus, abounding consolations in the troubles and sorrows of life which may afflict believers, protection against many ills and foes, with deliverances from dangers and difficulties. All ills in life are anticipated and provided against, and all succour, guidance, and

grace are stored up in Christ by the promises, on which the Christian draws by faith as from a bank that never fails.

Therefore the promises are addressed and adapted to every class and condition of the human family. They come with encouragement to the king, the statesman, the rich, the poor, the strong, the weak, the wise, the ignorant, the neglected, the well-cared-for, the timid, the brave, the slave, the little child. The promises gather all to the great heart of God, and secure to them privileges and gifts incalculable and invaluable.

The promises of God extend themselves beyond the bounds of the present life into eternity. They give assurance to the Christian against the endurance of pain or sorrow, against the continued evil of sin, and the fear of punishment. They tell with unmistakable certainty of a glorious resurrection from the grave, and of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for all believers.

The extent and variety of the promises are incalculable. There are large comprehensive assurances which seem to enclose within themselves the treasures of the universe and of eternity for the saint of God, and there are separate and particular ones which subdivide themselves until they touch everything that concerns or relates to man in every position. There is no place or circumstance in which a man may be found, nor any experience common

to life, but some word of encouragement and hope reaches him there from the mouth of God.

These promises are not meagre in form, as though they were from the hand of a reluctant miser. All the wealth of eloquence, all the reserves of poetic imagery, all the invention of Divine wisdom, are employed to represent the fulness of the Father's love which dictates them, and which is pledged to fulfil them.

There are books of great value in which the promises contained in the Bible are gathered up, and classified in the order of their subjects. They were held in great value by Christians a few generations ago, as being helpful to a devout life. Even a casual glance at the contents table of these books reveals the extraordinary number and value of the promises. In variety and quantity they resemble an old-fashioned garden. Or better still, they are illustrated by the manifoldness of the wild flowers which in countless number and in diversified hues unfold themselves by the brooksides or in the forest glades. So are the promises scattered throughout the Bible marvellous in their abundance and adapted to the varying needs of each man, woman or child in the wide earth.

## II.

### **Consider the preciousness of the Promises.**

The preciousness of anything may depend upon

its intrinsic nature, or upon its relative usefulness or value to a certain individual. To offer a royal pardon to an innocent man would be to trifle with or insult him. But the same thing offered to a condemned criminal within an hour of expected execution would be the most valuable blessing which he could receive. The promises are unspeakably precious in both these senses. They are invaluable as to their own nature, they are equally so as respects their perfect adaptation to the urgent needs of human nature.

Looked at in their essential character the value of the promises is infinite. They are the chosen words of the Most Wise God, spoken to His children, and intended to be to them an expression of His love, and His desire for their eternal welfare. They must therefore be of all words the most choice in the universe. "More to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Boswell devoted years of his life to gathering up the words of Dr Johnson, thankfully submitting to snubs and slights, truckling before him like a beaten cur, if he might but be allowed to hear his conversation and record it. Whenever Coleridge conversed, note-books were in hand and every sentence eagerly recorded. Oh! to have spent a night with Milton, to have heard Jeremy Taylor preach, to have walked with Wordsworth as he recited the "Excursion," or better still to have talked with Paul in prison, or with John in the isle of

Patmos. These things were not for us, but something higher still we may possess. The promises of God we have, and their deepest meaning and sweetest music may be unfolded to our souls by the Divine Spirit, until we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Promises made by God are safe, sure, infallible, guaranteed to us by the boundless resources and eternal power of the Creator and Upholder of the Universe.

The preciousness of the promises in their bearing and effect upon Christians may be demonstrated by several considerations.

1. *They afford abundant compensations amid the hardships and vicissitudes of the earthly pilgrimage.* They kiss the wrinkles of care from the brow, they smooth the difficulties in the daily struggle, they charm away the fears and forebodings of the timid soul, they shine with steady light in the murky gloom, they distil sweetest fragrance amid the miasmas of sin, they reveal the grace of Jesus when the dangers of sin are most threatening. In the mammoth cave of Kentucky, after tracing its rocky galleries for about eight miles, the traveller reaches what is called the Star Chamber. There, standing deep down in the bowels of the earth, he finds himself in a spacious apartment. Looking up he beholds the ceiling overhead glittering with resplendent brightness, rivalling the glory of the firmament on a clear starlight night. So it is with the promises of God. When every earthly comfort and joy seems

to have vanished out of life, the promises reveal themselves, dispersing the gloom, shining in a thousand forms of brightness and beauty, and producing hope and joy of the purest kind.

2. *The promises translate life's labours and duties into privileges and enjoyments.* There are innumerable duties in life which are intolerably dreary and monotonous in themselves, and which make life to many an unbroken drudgery. But the promises of God, which have reference to all labour and duty in life, completely transform these into being a delight and joy. Love, from which all the promises spring, creates love in the heart of the Christian, the centre of gravity in every soul is changed, things have a new aspect, action has a new spring, labour brings a great reward, drudgery is suffused with a divine halo, affliction becomes a blessed discipline, the commonplace is transfigured and glorified, the heaviest cross becomes an exalted honour and a sanctifying power. The law of life to the believer is that spoken by the Christ, "*for my sake*"; and obedience to that law changes loss into gain, labour into rest, sorrow into gladness, death into life eternal. All the promises thus become Yea and Amen, and the humblest believer becomes a son of God and an heir of glory.

3. *The promises inspire the soul with fortitude and valour.* Life is a warfare. The battle never ceases. It never ceased with the blessed Christ. All the forces of evil in the universe raged against Him, and

during His earthly life this world was the theatre of the greatest moral conflict ever experienced. In our own measure, we have the same warfare to accomplish, and the same enemies to encounter. Foes from within and without, whose name is legion, war against us ; the world, the flesh, and the devil are leagued against us ; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, watch to betray us at every step of our career. The battle is waged every day and hour, and with subtle malice and almost infinite ingenuity, our great enemy, the head of the empire of darkness, seeks to betray us in an unwatchful moment. It is not wonderful that Christians so often become discouraged, fall into the hands of Giant Despair, and are shut up in Doubting Castle.

But the promises inspire a man with faith and courage. The odds against a man like Paul were overwhelming, but he was unappalled in the most trying ordeal. "I can do all things," he said, "through Christ that strengtheneth me." The calm, determined fight maintained by the great Christian leaders through the centuries, with all the forces of evil ranged against them, is a spectacle for men and angels. Not one of them quailed or recanted. The inspiration of the battle which nerved their arm and gave victory to their effort, came from the promises, which assured them of the Divine presence, and of the all-conquering energy of the Son of God. Therefore they cried in desperate extremities : "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

4. *The promises enable a man to realise firm foothold in life.* The believer walks surely, because he grasps them as his staff and stay. "I will trust and not be afraid," is his motto. "Nay, but we are always confident," is his experience. No one else is, "*always* confident." The capitalist is never confident. A slump in the market may occur any day, and the wealth which is his trust may be gone. The statesman is never confident. The popular will which has carried him into power may change like the wind, and he may be cast down into obscurity. All earthly hopes and trusts may change and bring reverses to the worldly-minded. But the Christian has a better and an enduring substance. He has "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Therefore, as Cyprian said, "his faith and hope stand secure against all the world," his anchor is sure and steadfast, because it is cast, as Luther said, "in the upper heights of glory." He knows, and is certain, having proved them fully, that "the promises are not yea and nay, but yea and amen," to those who believe. Therefore he walks with a firm tread; amidst storms and changes, amidst trials and vicissitudes, in life and death, "always confident."

### III.

**The expression in the text "exceeding," is a remarkable one.**

Exceeding thought, overleaping imagination,

passing the bounds of language to express or of human capacity to fully realise. If we could take one promise of the Christ, such as the imperial one of His early ministry, "Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest," and begin to illuminate it by gathering up the testimonies during the succeeding ages, of those who have been converted, encouraged, comforted and inspired by it, the words of John would be literally true, "the whole world could not contain the books which might be written." So with all the promises. Blessed experiences might be narrated without limit of those who have proved their reality and power, so that "they are *exceeding* great and precious promises." They are a divine oratorio of sweeter music than Handel or Haydn ever discoursed, sometimes giving out a gentle strain which whispers tender consolation to the smitten soul, and anon a combination of enrapturing strains which inspire the believer with ardent zeal in holy service ; sometimes rendering a symphony of melting pathos which woos the heart to devotion, followed by a burst and whirlwind of ravishing sounds which carry the entranced spirit into the holiest, and prepare it either for noble communions or testing warfares. They sing of mercy and judgment, they stretch faith to a wider capacity, they cause a larger Christ to dilate before the purged vision of the saint.

## IV.

Little can be said here of the highest and ultimate fulfilment of the Divine promises:—"that through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature."

This does not mean an absorption into the Divine Being. Man never loses his distinct personality or identity. He is ever a conscious individuality ; intimate fellowship with God, and participation in His nature, make the human personality more perfect and full. The promises bring the believer into such close and intimate association with the Persons of the Godhead, that he comes to partake of the beauty, love, strength, and glory thereof. The redeemed manhood or womanhood, by receiving the fulness of the Holy Spirit, is exalted into the enjoyment of eternal life, and thereby the qualities, gifts, capacities, and faculties of human nature are purified and expanded to an unimaginable degree. They become capable of reflecting the Divine image and realising the Divine indwelling so fully as to be "partakers" of the Divine nature. This privilege is capable of endless expansion, and what human nature sanctified and glorified by the closer vision of the Risen Christ in the City of God will be, thought cannot conceive. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be ; we know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him even as He is."



THE ADAM AND EVE OF GREAT  
FAITH

By FRED. LUKE WISEMAN, B.A.



## THE ADAM AND EVE OF GREAT FAITH

"I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."—  
MATTHEW viii. 10.

"O woman, great is thy faith."—MATTHEW xv. 28.

JESUS Christ taught that faith was the most powerful force in the world. It would bring down mountains and root up sycamore trees; nothing indeed was impossible to him that believed. He was always on the look-out for faith. It grieved Him that so often He looked in vain. Many a time His power was restrained because of the unbelief of the bystanders. His very disciples He had to chide because of their little faith. His servants of to-day come under the same impeachment, and justify, alas, His wistful reflection: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" What do we know about uprooting trees by faith? Where is the modern Zerubbabel, before whom the great mountain becomes a plain? We have whittled down these sayings of the Lord to a mere figure of speech. And the world, having no experience of its mighty energy, mocks at the thought that faith,

which it confounds with unreasoning credulity, should be pleasing to God.

Once, in my hearing, the master of a chemistry class asked a pupil how he would test for the presence of salt in a substance. "Taste it, sir," waggishly replied the boy. "Good," replied the master, 'senseless of the bob,' "but supposing there was not enough salt in the substance to make it taste, how would you test then?" After a pause for reflection, "Please sir, I should add a little more!" came the bright and original reply. I fear that in modern Christianity the salt of faith has so far lost its savour that before testing for its presence and power we should have to do something similar!

But on two occasions, and so far as we know on only two, the Lord stated that He found great faith; that is to say, He found faith in sufficient quantity to warrant an experiment as to its powers. Singularly enough, it was exhibited once by a man, and once by a woman. Of the Centurion, Christ said: "I have not found so great faith in Israel"; and to the Syro-Phœnician woman, He said: "O woman, great is thy faith." Let us draw near to this Adam and Eve of great faith, in search of answers to inquiries of great import as to the result and worth of faith.

The instances afford us this further advantage: the faith exists by itself. Every chemist knows that certain elements have affinity for certain other elements, and that great care is necessary in conducting an experiment concerning the one to avoid

the vitiation of the result by the intrusion of the other. So preconceived idea readily allies with faith, and vitiates and too often counteracts its action. In our Lord's time, for instance, the great hindrance to His people's faith in Him was their preconceived idea of what the Messiah was to be and to do. Now, significantly enough, the two persons who exhibited great faith were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. The Centurion was a Roman, the Syro-Phœnician woman a Gentile; their faith subsisted by itself, apart from any preconceived idea concerning the Messiah. We may then conduct our experiment without any haunting fear that the result will be invalidated by the unsuspected presence of this alien element.

*We go, then, into the laboratory and test this great faith, to ascertain the answer to two questions of vast and abiding importance:—What is the action of great faith in respect to: (1) Moral qualities; (2) Mental endowments?*

If great faith is not consistent with high morals, away with faith. If it produce good living but poor thinking, we may well pause before we commit ourselves wholly to its guidance. But if it be not inconsistent with the possession of both the one and the other, especially if it call them forth, we can understand how that "without faith it is impossible to please Him."

## I.

**Using, therefore, the examples before us, we will first test the effect of great faith in the production of moral qualities.**

And at the outset, it will be well to inquire what qualities in man and in woman are considered estimable. The last generation had a ready means of ascertaining an opinion on these particulars which we do not possess. The middle-aged will immediately guess that I refer to the "Confession Album," that instrument of exquisite torture which in these humaner days public opinion has banished along with the thumbscrew and the stake and other barbarous weapons of inquisition. But if among your relics you possess one of these curiosities, and will turn to the questions demanding answer, you will note there is one, "What is your favourite moral quality in man?" and a second like unto it, "What is your favourite moral quality in woman?" Turn over the pages at random.

Your favourite moral quality in a man :—"Manliness," writes one ; "Trustworthiness," writes another ; "Straightforwardness," writes a third ; "Humility," "Kindliness," "Consideration," say others.

Your favourite moral quality in a woman :—"Womanliness," "Affection," "Patience," "Modesty," "Perseverance," "Gentleness," so they variously compute.

So far, the Confession Album, which supplies us indeed with an excellent list of virtues, all of which we have seen exemplified. But have we ever met such a paragon as to manifest them all? Turn, then, to the man of great faith, and test his qualities by the Confession Album.

*Manliness.* Is not this army officer every inch a man? He has that in his face we would fain call master—authority. *Consideration and kindness.* In that tender plea for his servant, who fails to see this virtue? And its presence is rendered the more remarkable that the man is a Roman, who, therefore, if he value his reputation, ought not to show the slightest feeling when his favourite slave dies. But here is one who is so concerned that he even stoops to ask a favour of a Jew. And then, again, that delicate consideration for the Lord—"Trouble not the Master." "Don't make Him toil all the way to my house." *Straightforwardness.* I say "Go," "Come," "Do this." The direct, laconic speech of the soldier, characteristically using no circumlocution, but going straight for his object. *Humility.* Ah! here we shall look in vain. Such a man may be pardoned a little pride. It is the venial failing of his virtues. But wait! "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." Who would have expected such humility in such a man?

Well might the Lord remark upon so rare and well-developed a character; but instead of so doing, He pierces through the exterior manifestation to the

living kernel within, and says it is faith, great faith. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

So, again, we might examine the character of the woman. What true womanliness! What motherly affection, undertaking the long journey, and submitting to such rebuffs! What true modesty, despite the boldness of perseverance; and what rare patience to keep sweet-tempered while smarting under such rebuke, and at the end to answer with a hopeful smile! And again the Lord, who could not but admire such sterling qualities, yet passed them by, so that He could call attention to the source whence they all proceeded: "O woman, great is thy faith."

Now here they are, these great moral qualities in man and woman, which we take years slowly and painfully to acquire, displayed in one action by the Adam and Eve of great faith. Faith is not inconsistent with moral greatness, but on the other hand, is productive of it. In the presence of Jesus, through faith in Him, these great virtues are spontaneously called forth.

But it is generally admitted that faith produces good morals; the objection is rather that the price paid is too great. Faith, it is said, strengthens the moral, but weakens the mental processes. Great faith cannot co-exist with free thought and high thinking.

## II.

**Let us turn, then, once more to our examples, to find how faith has reacted on their mental endowments.**

We examine the Centurion first, and his great faith is at once apparent. "Lord," he says, "don't trouble to come to my house, but speak the word, and though he is so far away, my servant shall at once be healed." A veritable triumph of faith! "For"—Ah! the word strikes a chill. From the sublime height of unquestioning faith he is descending to the misty plains of reasoning! Better he should not proceed! Yet he speaks on, and his Lord is not displeased. "For I too have received authority over the soldiers placed under me, and from where I stand I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; distance from him is nothing, he recognises my authority and obeys. Now I perceive Thou hast received authority over evil spirits and diseases. It is not needful that Thou shouldst come into the presence of the one diseased. From where Thou art, say to the disease, 'Depart,' and it will at once depart." Did you ever hear a cleverer argument from analogy than this? And the Lord was moved and pleased by it, but rejoiced more over the great faith that had quickened the mental powers and called it forth.

Look at the Syro-Phœnician woman. According

to the proverb, "Trust a woman's conclusion, but don't trust her reasons," her mind should act rather through intuition or mother-wit than reason. "Give her the boon she asks," say the disciples to their strangely delaying Lord. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel," He replies. Ah! to be sure! Then of course it is of no use the woman waiting any more. The syllogism is complete. Christ is only sent to the House of Israel. This woman is not of the House of Israel. Therefore Christ is not sent to her. It stands to reason! Give her a trifle to help her home, and dismiss her. But she passes the officious friend who argues with her.

"Lord, help me!" she cries.

"It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

Dogs! Would that the poor creature had listened to reason; never then would she have heard that harsh word, so unlike the speech Jesus uses. But with a smile she looks now right into the Lord's face and says,

"True, Lord, and as a mother myself, I should never think of giving the children's bread to dogs. But look at the picture Thou hast Thyself conjured up. The children at the table with enough and to spare, and, Lord, the dogs eating too, from the crumbs that fall."

O woman, keen is thy wit! Yes, but the wit is keen because the faith is great! Faith in Jesus

gave insight into the heart, the real purpose of Jesus, and she saw that He was not Himself in refusing.

“Eh, mister,” said a converted Yorkshire labourer to a friend of mine who had lent him, after his conversion, a copy of Wesley’s Hymns, whose contents the man had devoured with joy, “what a fine thing this ’ere religion is for oppenin’ the hintellec’.” So it is. There is nothing like it, as thousands of our people have found. For the production and preservation of strong and attractive moral character and of clear, deep, sound, and earnest thinking, there’s nothing like *great faith in Jesus Christ*.



THE STRENGTHENING OF THE  
INWARD MAN

By J. G. TASKER, D.D.



## THE STRENGTHENING OF THE INWARD MAN

"That ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man."—EPHESIANS iii. 16.

"THAT ye may be *strengthened*"—this prayer accords with the exhortation which St Paul frequently addresses to Christians and to Christian churches. "Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. ii. 1, R.V.) is his charge to Timothy, his "beloved child" in the gospel; his final injunction to the Ephesians, is "Be always being strengthened in the Lord" (vi. 10, *cf.* R.V.). There is encouragement for the weak in the Apostle's words; he knows that to become strong we must be strengthened, and that if we are to be always strong we must be always being strengthened. The secret of power is a spirit always in touch with the infinite sources of power, a spirit ever open to the influence of those mighty forces which, in the spiritual as in the natural world, always work along the lines of least resistance.

In every sphere of life to-day, there is an urgent demand for strength or efficiency. The apostles of physical culture denounce, in large letters, the "crime"

of not being strong. Their laudable endeavour is to persuade us to develop our powers by exercise, but they have no gospel for the weak. There are strong-minded men who agree with Mr John Stuart Mill that notwithstanding all the talk about brain-fag, it would do most people good to use their minds more than they do. And if worry be distinguished from work, it is probably true that increased mental effort would mean, for the majority of people, increased mental power. There is a corresponding truth in the spiritual life as every Christian knows. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to the harmful effects which are the inevitable result of neglecting to exercise the higher faculties of the soul (v. 11, 14). Though our ears have been opened and we have heard the whisper of His love, we shall become "dull of hearing" unless we listen often and listen long for the still and small and inward voice of His Spirit. Therefore, let us "exercise" ourselves "unto godliness" (1 Tim. ii. 7), but withal let us remember that the central truth of the Christian gospel is not that we are to become strong merely by development of our own powers, by exercise of our own faculties, by conservation of our own energies; if we are to become strong, we must be strengthened by a "power that is not ourselves," and St Paul can name that power and bear witness to its energising—it is the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the text St Paul prays that believers may *share his own experience*. His prayers give us

welcome glimpses into the depths of his spiritual life ; but the record of his personal experience also casts light upon the meaning of his prayers. This prayer becomes more precious when we remember that it is the prayer of one who himself out of weakness has been made strong. In two familiar passages the Apostle relates his experience in the inward man ; the first expresses his sense of weakness, the second his consciousness of increasing strength. To study them is to allow St Paul himself to expound his prayer.

## I.

### **The Apostle's sense of weakness.**

In Romans vii. 22, St Paul says : " I delight in the law of God after the inward man." He is recalling a painful memory. He cannot forget the days when inward approval of God's law, recognition of its claims as holy, just and good, made him keenly conscious of a paralysing sense of weakness. He was like a captive heavily fettered ; he had power " to will," but not " to do that which is good " (v. 18). To the truth of this graphic description of conflict and discord in " the inward man," universal experience testifies. Men catch glimpses of the better, yet follow the worse. Who has not proved, to his own humbling, that good resolutions are of no avail, if therein be his trust ? The accuracy of St Paul's diagnosis of human ill is confirmed by what modern physicians of the

mind distressed tell us concerning the malady of our age. How exactly the Apostle "puts his finger on the place," if they are right who declare that our ailment is *aboulia*, that is to say, impotence of resolve, paralysis of will! The nineteenth century poet teaches the same doctrine as the first-century theologian, when he exclaims:—

"But ill for him who, bettering not with time,  
Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended Will."

Is it possible for the will to grow "ever weaker"? With true insight Tennyson replies that it is both possible and easy. Moral strength deteriorates not only "thro' acted crime," but also through "seeming genial, venial fault." To corrupt the strength of heaven-descended will, all that is needful is to indulge in venial faults, which our foolish companions tell us make us all the more genial comrades. What an impressive picture of the helplessness of such a man is sketched in the lines:—

"He seems as one whose footsteps halt,  
Toiling in immeasurable sand."

He is weary, but scarcely nearer than when he started to the city he is trying to reach. In the distance it "sparkles" on the hillside "like a grain of salt," but before he can enter its gates his feeble, halting footsteps must cross that dreary waste of "immeasurable sand."

## II.

**Contrast this picture of the man whose will is enfeebled, with the picture of the Apostle whose inward strength has been renewed.**

The contrast is all the more striking because St Paul has described, in words that will never be surpassed, the weakness of human nature left to itself; but it is he who once was "without strength" who describes his victorious wrestling with unholy powers; it is he who once could scarcely drag his chains, who, like a spiritual athlete, climbs from one peak to another, and, as he goes from strength to strength, sings always one glad song: "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13).

The inward man, of which St Paul speaks as delighting in the law of God, is the moral personality. When the inward man is regenerated, it becomes "the new man"; but before this renewal in the spirit of our mind (Eph. iv. 23), the inward man can recognise the goodness of Him whose holy law is the expression of an ideal, which wins the admiration of him whose failures compel him to cry, "It is high, it is high; I cannot attain unto it." If, therefore, we allow this record of St Paul's *personal experience* to cast light upon his prayer, we see that to be "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man" means the invigoration of our

noblest powers, the enriching of the higher self, the imparting of new energy to our whole conscious personal being. The result of the Holy Spirit's energising is neither the gradual extinction of desire nor the enfeeblement of the will; on the contrary, the Spirit-filled personality desires more ardently and wills more strongly. The difference is that the inward man is no longer "infirm of purpose." All, and more than all, that the wisest ethical teachers intend, when they extol the virtue of self-control, is a gift of grace to those who "walk in the flesh," but "do not war according to the flesh." Those who "walk in the Spirit" also war according to the Spirit, and in the Spirit's strength they are enabled to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 5).

On the answering of this prayer depends our passing from the experience described in Romans vii.—experience of continual conflict and frequent failure—to the experience described in Romans viii.—experience of victories gained on battle-grounds which have been the scenes of disastrous defeat. A single word, probably coined by St Paul, marks the greatness of the contrast. In a power not his own he has learnt not only how to conquer, but how to conquer and have strength to spare. Owing to the bestowal of this overplus of power, he is not like the soldier utterly spent and unable to follow up the advantage so dearly bought. He is "*more than conqueror* through Him that loved us," and

assures us of victory on the same conditions. For "more than conquerors we may be," if, and only "if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in us" (Rom. viii. 9, 37).

### III.

**In 2 Corinthians iv. 16, St Paul says: "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day."**

There had been much in the apostle's recent experience to remind him of the frailty of the earthly tabernacle in which, for a time, his indomitable spirit found its home. He knew that his more abundant labours were wearing out his body, but he was conscious of increased spiritual energy, as bodily strength diminished. In the opening verses of this Epistle he refers to an affliction so heavy that, as he himself expresses it, "we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power" (i. 8). That was the simple truth, but it was not the whole truth. The burden described as "beyond our power" is not beyond the power working in us, when we are willing for that power to work mightily. There are two ways of making a heavy burden light; its weight may be lessened, or our strength may be increased. The result is the same; henceforth the burden rests lightly upon the shoulders.

It was strengthening with power in the inward

man that enabled St Paul to call the affliction "light" (iv. 17 f.) which was, nevertheless, heavy enough to be beyond his power. He has burdens to carry still, but the Holy Spirit's energising enables him to carry them with alert step and with head erect, so that he never loses sight of the things above, but has glimpses of the eternal glory towards which he is hastening. The Apostle's experience supplies everyone who has a burden to carry with a ready test. Our burdens do us no harm until they bow our spirits down to earth; they will develop our highest powers, if we have grace to carry them, walking with firm and buoyant tread, and cheered by that vision of the things unseen and eternal which is the never-failing reward of the upward look.

If, therefore, we allow this record of St Paul's *experience in Christian service* to cast light upon his prayer, we see that to be "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man" means the supply of energy which enables us to toil for Christ without spiritual exhaustion, and to bear one another's burdens, for His sake, without so soon becoming faint and weary. "Wherefore, we faint not," exclaims St Paul. Christian workers need, in hours of disappointment, to remember his secret. Discouragement in the Master's service cannot always be cured by greater diligence. To labour hard, even for Him, is no guarantee of happiness. Indeed, the higher the service, the deeper

will be our dejection if we fail to lay hold of the hope set before us in our glorious calling, because the task assigned proved to be beyond our strength.

“Happy we live, when God doth fill  
Our hands with work.”

If that were the only condition, most Christians could be happy every day and happy all the day. But our realisation of the Beatitude depends not upon the filling of our hands with work, but upon the filling of our hearts with zeal.

“Happy we live, when God doth fill  
Our hands with work, *our hearts with zeal.*”

Significantly we speak of being “disheartened” in our work for Christ; our use of the word should warn us against allowing the inward altar-fires to die down, or even to burn low. Without the Holy Spirit’s strengthening with power in the inward man, it is impossible for the heart to be always as full of zeal as the hands are full of work.

“The sum of all is—Yes, my duty is great :  
My faith’s still greater ; then my faith’s enough.”

For the promised gift of the Holy Spirit be it ours to ask the Father, let us ask in the name of Christ, and let us ask in faith. The Holy Spirit’s strengthening shall empower us to control the foes within, which hitherto have rebelled against the sway of Christ’s sceptre of love ; His strength shall

make us "mighty to prevail . . . where unaided man must fail"; His strength shall sustain us beneath the heaviest load, and renew our vigour even when others' burdens are added to our own; yea, His strength shall so energise our will, that no dispiriting exhaustion shall rob us of the joy and the reward of being fit to labour from early morn, through the mid-day heat, and in the twilight glow.

"Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,  
Or others—that we are not always strong?"

The Christian who is weak when he might be strong is assuredly *doing wrong to others*. None of us liveth to himself; we are members one of another. Some friend, who hoped that we should prove as a stout staff for support, has, it may be, found us to be no better than a reed, easily bent and broken, and perhaps a reed that pierced the hand that leaned upon it. And yet that we may "always have all sufficiency," and so "may abound unto every good work," is the promise and the purpose of God, who makes "all grace abound" unto us (2 Cor. ix. 8).

"Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,  
Or others—that we are not always strong?  
That we are ever overborne with care,  
That we should ever weak or heartless be,  
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer;  
And joy, and strength, and courage are with Thee."

THE ABIDING PRESENCE

By ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.



## THE ABIDING PRESENCE

“Lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”—  
MATTHEW xxviii. 20.

THE changes which come to us both in character and in environment are numerous and momentous. Instability seems the law of life, to all who are content to occupy the earthly standpoint only. But our Christian faith affords a steady counteractive to pessimism. Our Lord has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel, and is Himself the one evidence of it which is abiding and incontrovertible. All those who rest their hopes on His teaching and personality have a right to feel like men who, having escaped the quicksands which threatened to engulf them, now stand on the rock which towers aloft beyond the range of moving sands and of the restless sea.

It is not possible to imagine a more fitting close to the Gospel than the assurance in our text, for it reveals our truest, dearest Friend, our only Saviour, as one immortal and changeless, overshadowing us with His presence “alway,” even when we cannot see Him, and find it hard to believe that He is near. It

may do something to inspire us with hope and courage if we think over this wonderful promise, which assures us that one friend remains, even though all others may forsake us; and that whether joy or sorrow, work or suffering, life or death be our appointed lot, we may hear the whisper of our Lord saying, "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

It is to be feared that, in the consciousness of most of us, our Lord's living presence has not been recognised as it should have been or as it might have been. But the hindrance to the joy of it has been all on our side. If slime and ooze make hideous and perilous the spot once covered by the rippling waters of a many dimpled sea, it is not because the ocean is dry, but because some careless warder has shut the sea gates against it. We may have as much of our Lord's presence as we can hold. All that is required is that we open our hearts to give Him welcome, and submit our whole lives to His influence, in order that He may cleanse and quicken us according to His own good will. Then let us open our souls Christward, that He may flood us with light and love.

Our text is the utterance of Jesus Christ Himself, who never deceived, and never exaggerated. Even those who deny that He possessed supernatural attributes, are ready to admit the absolute truthfulness of the man Christ Jesus, and recognise the love He bore to His disciples, whom He would not mislead by fallacious promises. But if they accept these

Gospels as trustworthy, it is hard to see how they can reconcile their views of our Lord's veracity with such an astounding assertion as this. It claims what no mere man ever did claim, or ever could claim, without presumption and blasphemy. To say that after His departure from the world He would still be with His friends, and with each of them to the end of the world, was to claim Divine prerogative. For surely the words cannot be reasonably interpreted as meaning that His memory would remain their perpetual possession, or that His teaching would never be forgotten, or that His influence would be abidingly among them, or that His example would be a constant inspiration. The disciples clearly believed that He meant precisely what He said: "Lo! I am with you alway," the personal friend you have long known, whom once more you see here and now before you. Both in the Acts and in the Epistles there are frequent assertions that these words were literally fulfilled. The apostles knew that He was beside them, and often said so. We must either fling aside the whole record as historically untrustworthy, or else accept the repeated assurances that, not only after His resurrection but after His ascension, the Lord revealed Himself to His disciples as One who knew all about their circumstances, and was therefore able to reveal Himself as their Guide and Helper just when He was needed most.

## I.

**Let us try to understand, in order that we may better realise, the promised presence of the Lord Jesus. To begin with, we must recognise its spirituality.**

When we come to think of it, this is implied in the very nature of the promise, because as these men would be scattered from each other, and working in different countries, no one still subject (as all material things are) to the limits of time and space could be with them all, and with each of them alway. Just after uttering this promise to the disciples, Jesus ascended up from them, till a cloud received Him out of their sight; and instantly they knew that He would never be with them again as He had been during His ministry. Indeed, certain of His own words which may have recurred to their minds at this moment would seem to contradict the promise: "Me ye have not always," and "now ye see Me no more." They must have known that it was not any coming like that which had gladdened them in the storm on the lake, to which He referred in this promise. It was a spiritual presence, which could only be spiritually discerned.

I think that the various manifestations of our Lord after His resurrection, were not only meant to prove that He was alive, but also to indicate who those were to whom, after His death and departure from

earth, He would still be a living reality. Before His crucifixion He was as visible to Scribes and Pharisees, to Herod and Pilate, as to Peter, James, and John. But after His rising from the dead, it was not so. Sceptical Pilate and false-hearted priests had no more sign that He, Jesus, was alive again, than that either of the two robbers crucified with Him was still living. Men might be well-read in religious literature, or keenly intellectual, letting no philosophical theory escape them, or high in ecclesiastical office in a divinely appointed church, but these were not qualifications for seeing Jesus after His resurrection. These were to be found in the love which yearned for Him, in the obedience proffered to Him, and in the devotional spirit without which no man can ever see visions of God.

The risen Christ was seen by Mary, and by other women, whose love centred in Him whether He was crowned or crucified. He appeared to the two honest men who were trying to reconcile fact with prophecy, and mourned over the shameful sin which had nailed Him to the cross.

He showed Himself to be alive, by infallible proofs, to the Apostle whose hasty denial had been followed by sincere penitence; and to him who could not accept evidence which had convinced his brethren, but whose heartfelt prayer was "Lord, help me to believe, for as yet I cannot." I say that these incidents were intended to show, in a way convincing and memorable, that to see the Lord after His

entrance on the spiritual life demanded faith, love, obedience, and devotion ; and only in proportion as these are ours can we enjoy the fulfilment of the promise : " Lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Although from absence of inward preparedness fewer in Palestine would see Him after His resurrection than before, yet the breaking down of time and space limits made it possible for a multitude, which no man can number, to see and know Him in all ages and lands. Outside the little land of Palestine none knew Him during His earthly ministry ; but now people of all nations and tongues are praising Him. Then the voice of a blind man might be drowned by angry rebukes, and Greeks who wished to see Him had to make diligent search for someone to introduce them ; while one poor woman had to face the scorn of a crowd, and another the hate of a Pharisee, if she would come near enough to receive His blessing. But now He is not far from any one of us. The inward sob which is choked down, lest it should be heard by curious ears, throbs on His heart ; and when we enter into our closet and shut the door that we may pour out our souls secretly before Him, we know that ours is no despairing cry sent up into an empty heaven, but a prayer which is understood by one who is with us alway, and still whispers, " Fear thou not, for I am with thee."

## II.

**Again, in our text, there is a suggestion of immortality.**

It was after His death that Jesus uttered these words. And it is evident that He thought of His coming ascension, not as the end of His work for sinners, but as the means of completing it. He was obliged to leave the few that He might be present with the many; and to endure the pain of a present parting, that there might be an eternal dwelling together. "For to this end Christ both died and rose and relived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." No one can read the Epistles, or think seriously about the sacred feast which reminds us that His body was broken, and His blood was shed for the remission of sins, without seeing that the death of our Lord was of supreme importance, so that the apostles gloried in preaching "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," and the redeemed sing the praises of "The Lamb that has been slain": but His life after death is of equal moment. Apart from it, the Lord's Supper would be a memorial of defeat, not of victory; and without the assurance of our Lord's resurrection, we could not glory in His cross. Therefore the two facts are to be blended; neither is to be forgotten: and while the Sacrament commemorates His death, the day of the Sacrament commemorates His resurrection. As

those risen with Him, we are to seek the things which are above. For He is not here, He is risen ; and has ascended to reign over both worlds, Lord of the dead and the living.

Indeed, our own hope of immortality lies here. It is because we know that death did not hold our Lord captive, or hinder His upward and heavenward progress, that we are able to speak of the "blessed dead," and sing :

"Released from earthly toil and strife,  
With Thee is hidden still their life ;  
Thine are their thoughts, their works, their powers—  
All Thine, and yet most truly ours ;  
For well we know, where'er they be,  
Our dead are living unto Thee."

We have no right to speak of the dead as if their existence had ended, for really it has been ennobled. It is not true that they merely were, for they still are. The dead are simply the living who have died, passing on, as our Lord Himself did, from pain and woe to possibilities far beyond our present range of thought.

### III.

**Our text was an assurance to the Lord's  
disciples of His personal sympathy.**

It was the personal element which gave the promise its peculiar value. No angel, however noble and gracious, could ever be to disciples what Jesus had

been. They had seen proofs of His power, and knew that it had always been used for their help: and although He had died at last in seeming helplessness, they now began to perceive that He must have been a willing victim, for He had conquered death, and stood before them in the power of a victorious life. And they thankfully remembered that often during His ministry He had suffered with them, taking on Himself always the heavier end of every burden. There was no sorrow, there is no sorrow, which He cannot sympathise with. He understands the grief of being misunderstood by those most reckoned on; the depression of doing work steadfastly, though it does not seem to succeed; the struggle against temptation, whether in the wilderness or the garden; the sorrow of having friendship marred by faithlessness and cowardice; the pain of the scourge, the shame of cruel mockings, and the agony of the cross. The disciples could not go, nor can you or I go, out of the range of our Lord's sympathy; and He is with us alway.

#### IV.

**Finally, the constancy of His presence demands our thought and gratitude.**

He promises to be with us "alway," and will readily answer the prayer, "Come, not to sojourn, but abide with me." Not only at the Sacrament, but in the

business, not only on the Lord's own day, but every day, we are to think of Him, speak to Him, and look for Him. I went twice to the famous Antwerp Church before I could see Rubens' great picture representing our Lord's descent from the cross, for it is only shown at special times; and there are those who are satisfied with such fitful glimpses of their Lord Himself; but He wants us to see Him daily, hourly, that we may constantly have fresh renewals of His grace. Therefore do not try to live on past experiences. Do not look for evidences of spiritual life in bygone feeling. It is weary work to carry a load of rotting fruit, when the living trees all round us are laden with it; or to clasp a handful of dead flowers, when the fields and hedgerows are radiant with those living. Live each day on the grace given for that day. Dwell beside the exhaustless spring, instead of trusting to the few drops in a bottle almost spent. Learn to look to Christ hourly, to trust Him and lean upon Him everywhere, and to live as if you did believe His assurance: "Lo! I am with you alway."

If we all realised that Jesus spoke the truth when He said this, some of us would feel sorry and alarmed; for there is much which will not bear His inspection, and may well tremble at His coming. "What communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" Beware of harbouring the sins He came to conquer. Beware of exalting to His throne, self or sin. Remember

that the ark of God which blessed the house of Obed-edom brought down the idols in shame; and the Christ, whom the ark represented, must reign till all His enemies become His footstool. But if you are honestly sorry about the sins of the past, if there is nothing you wish more than to be rid of them for ever, yours is the heart which above all others He is eager to enter; for there was not one whom He welcomed more lovingly than the woman who was a sinner, who bathed His feet with penitential tears. And the fact that He is with you alway, will be your best safeguard against sin for the future.



THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER

BY GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.



## THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER

“But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.”—ST MARK x. 14.

WE have come naturally to regard these beautiful words as the great Gospel invitation to children—the charter, if we may so describe them, by which the privileges of His Kingdom are secured to the youngest of God's little ones. And that undoubtedly they are. At the same time, we must not forget that it was not to the children themselves, but to the disciples, that they were directly addressed. They were not in the first instance so much an invitation to the children to come, as a rebuke to those who would hinder the children from coming. And it is only as we look at them in their bearing upon all the actors in the scene which the Gospel story calls up before us, that we can understand their deepest significance.

Just before, Jesus had been engaged in a controversy with the Pharisees on the question of marriage and divorce. It was a question on which

they were divided into two rival schools, and He had answered both by referring them back to the original institution and law of God. Some, possibly, of the women who had heard the controversy, and noticed how in it Jesus took the woman's side, seemed to have thought that One who could be so tender and considerate towards women might have also a word of blessing for their children. And so they brought their children, their *babes*, according to the word in St Luke, to Jesus that He might touch them. For the disciples this was too much. Anxious that their Master should not be disturbed, impatient at the interruption of what they regarded as more important matters—they rebuked the mothers, and would have sent them away. "But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased"—the word is a very strong one—"He was moved with indignation, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God."

How easy it is for us to picture to ourselves the scene—the anxious mothers, pressing forward with their little ones in their arms—the well-meaning but inconsiderate disciples—and the Saviour Himself, so tender and compassionate, taking the children up in His arms, and putting His hands upon them and blessing them. It is one of the most beautiful scenes in all the rich pages of the Gospels. Let us look for a little at the different figures of the group which is thus brought before us—Jesus, His disciples, the

mothers, the little children—and see what we may learn from each.

## I.

### Jesus.

The loving act which Jesus is here represented as performing adds only one to the many tender and gracious acts of which the Gospel pages are full ; but it is one which we feel that we could not well do without. In many another well-remembered scene we see Jesus as He dealt with the sins and with the weakness, with the doubts and with the sorrows, of the men and women with whom He came in contact. The rich Pharisee and the poor widow—the Roman officer and the Jewish tax-gatherer—the anxious inquirer and the doubting disciple—the rich woman and the woman that was a sinner, all receive their several messages of pardon and peace. All remind us how the Gospel of Christ embraces in its wide scope the needs and wants of every human heart. But were these all the scenes in which the power and the work of Christ were manifested, should we not still feel that there was a blank ? They show us how the Saviour deals with sinning and sorrowing men and women, how He offers to them release, and claims them as His own. But what of the children, the helpless little ones in their unconscious infancy, ignorant as yet of their calling, or of what awaits them

in the future? Are they to wait until they have knowingly sinned and suffered before they can seek Christ, before He can find them? Or are they His already? Is He even now claiming them as members of His Heavenly Kingdom? That surely is what our Gospel story assures us of.

There is a significant story of the great sculptor Dannecker, that, when he was working at his statue of Christ, he took a little girl into his studio, and placing her before the figure asked her what she thought of it. For a moment the little one hesitated, and then replied, "He was a great Man." The sculptor was disappointed: that was not the ideal he had set before himself. But again he went bravely to work, toning down this line, throwing more expression into this feature, until at length it seemed to him that he had succeeded. And so it proved. For when again the child was permitted to gaze upon the wonderful figure, there was no longer any hesitancy in her words as she exclaimed, "That was the Christ who said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me!'"

It is a lesson of which in our own experience we are continually receiving fresh illustration. Only let Christ be truly presented to the children, and there is something in the perfect beauty and simplicity of His character to which their young hearts at once respond. They know themselves to be His, and He on His part welcomes them as fitting examples of what all His people ought to be.

## II.

**The Disciples.**

If this be so, we can understand, to pass from the Master to the disciples, how naturally Jesus would be moved with indignation against them for seeking to keep the children away from Him. No doubt anxiety to save their Master from what they regarded as unnecessary trouble was partly the explanation of their conduct, but there must have been more than that, or Jesus would not have rebuked them as He did. They had evidently an altogether wrong idea of the nature of Christ's Kingdom, and of the members of it. But, however that may have been, it is enough for us in the meantime that they sought to hinder the approach of the children to Christ. They were not purposely harsh, but had they been left to have their own way, the children would not have rested in the Saviour's arms, or had His words of blessing pronounced upon them.

And regarded in this light, do not the disciples become a *warning* to all who in any way *hinder* the spread of Christ's truth amongst His little ones? They may or may not do so consciously, but still by their lives and conversation they come between the children and Christ.

We all know how easily influenced children are. They are keenly alive to all that is going on around

them : they see and understand and follow far more than we sometimes imagine : and they incline most readily to the force of example, wherever it may lead. There is surely, then, a very solemn responsibility laid upon all who are in any way brought into contact with children, to see that their influence and example tend to what is good and not to what is evil, tend to draw the children nearer to Christ, rather than to hinder their approach to Him.

Few questions have a stronger effect upon parents who may themselves be the victims of sinful and vicious habits, than the question, Would they like to see their children growing up what they themselves are? If not lost to all sense of shame, they recoil with horror at the thought ; they offer their children every opportunity of learning those truths which they themselves in their daily lives are neglecting. And yet in so neglecting, and in the example thus offered, they are, alas ! in how many cases, undermining all the good which their children may otherwise receive. We cannot be too careful of our deeds and of our words in the presence of children, or to our dismay we may discover that we have sown in their young minds seeds destined afterwards to bear a terrible harvest. We cannot too earnestly strive to present the religion of Christ before them in all its simplicity and in all its love, that their hearts may respond to the glad tidings intended also for them.

In that pathetic scene in which Charles Dickens

describes the death of Jo, you will remember how Jo, in answer to the question whether he ever knew a prayer, told how, different times, "there was gen'l'men come down Tom All-alone's a-prayin', but they all mostly sed as the t'other wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-talkin' to theirselves, or a-passin' blame on the t'others, and not a-talkin' to us. *We* never know'd nothink. *I* never know'd what it wos all about." Poor little street Arab, passing away into the dim unknown with no other knowledge of Christ's religion than that! How would Christ's invitation have sounded to him, if heard from loving lips! Poor little fellow! and yet may not he be a type of many, ay of many even in professedly religious homes, kept back from the Saviour who is calling them, by the thoughtlessness and selfishness of men? Well may we pray with Dickens' great brother-writer Thackeray: "O Father beneficent! strengthen our hearts: strengthen and purify them, so that we may not have to blush before our children."

### III.

#### **The Mothers.**

But if the disciples are thus a warning to all who in any way are keeping back the children from Christ, in the mothers of our story we have an example of those eager and ready to present their

babes to Him. It is not enough not to hinder the children coming, they must also be brought.

Almost the closing scene of the Gospel narrative shows us a disciple who had sinned grievously, but who had repented, receiving his last charge from the Master he had denied. It had seemed to Peter indeed, for a time, that never again could he be employed in Christ's service; but no sooner had Christ received from him the renewed confession of his love, than the command was given, "Feed My lambs." The care of the lambs he with his brother disciples had once despised was to be the first duty of the restored Apostle. As we go back to that scene, and compare it with the scene of our text, do we not hear from the two scenes the two voices rising—the one of nature and the other of Christ, demanding that the children should be brought to Christ. We have seen already that Christ claims them as His own: and as His own He calls upon those to whom they have been entrusted here to bring them to Him that they may be taught and fed.

We are told that once in the course of a conversation with Madame Campan, Napoleon Buonaparte remarked, "The old systems of instruction seem to be worth nothing; what is yet wanting in order that the people should be properly educated?" "Mothers," replied Madame Campan. The reply struck the Emperor. "Yes," he said, "here is a system of education in one word. Be it your care, then, to train up mothers who shall know how to educate

their children." Have we not there a striking testimony to the power of home influence, to the degree in which those who watch over a child's earliest years mould and direct his after-life? It is more than a genealogical notice, it is a testimony to character, when in the Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel we read of such and such a king, "and his mother's name was so and so, and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." The memory of the prayer which he had learned by his mother's knee saved, so he himself tells us, a great American statesman from atheism. "The older I grow," says Thomas Carlyle, "and I am now upon the brink of eternity, the more comes back to me the first sentence of the Catechism which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes, 'What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.'"

But what need to go on multiplying testimonies? Do we not know for ourselves that the best lessons of our lives were the *first* lessons? How much sin and sorrow we should have been spared if we had always been true to them! But one thing we can do. We can seek to train up those coming after us in the knowledge and love of their Heavenly Father: we can show them that "fear of the Lord" which is the beginning of all true wisdom: and we can warn them against those dangers and temptations into which we ourselves have fallen.

The obligation rests upon all; but in a special sense it rests upon those who are parents. Let them be faithful to their trust. Let them endeavour loyally to fulfil the vows they took upon them when they presented their children to God in baptism. And then in the great Day of Account they will appear before God with joy, bringing their children with them.

#### IV.

##### **The Children.**

What can they teach us? Our Lord Himself has left us in no doubt. "Of such," He says, "is the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." It is the same lesson which Christ taught when He rebuked the pretensions of His disciples to greatness in the Kingdom of heaven, by setting a little child in the midst of them, and reminding them that, unless they became as that child, they would not only not be great in the Kingdom, but they would have no entrance there at all.

Our Saviour did not of course on either occasion mean that in all respects we are to be as little children. There are about them a fresh simplicity and an ignorance of evil which are not possible in the grown man. But He says, "In the purity, and in

the trust, and in the love of a little child, you will find the truest marks of My disciples. The more that in these respects you are like to them, the more will you show forth that you too are indeed the children of your Father in heaven."

"Of such the kingdom!—Teach Thou us,  
O Master most divine,  
To feel the deep significance  
Of these wise words of Thine!

"The haughty eye shall seek in vain  
What innocence beholds;  
No cunning finds the keys of heaven,  
No strength its gate unfolds.

"Alone to guilelessness and love  
That gate shall open fall;  
The mind of pride is nothingness,  
The child-like heart is all."



THE ONE CERTAINTY OF LIFE

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## THE ONE CERTAINTY OF LIFE

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."—2 TIMOTHY i. 12.

THE apostles did not, like some of their boasted successors, claim infallibility. It was enough for them that their Master could make no mistake. They never supposed that He had handed down to them His unerring vision and judgment. St Paul often confessed, as all great men do, that his knowledge was woefully limited. He acknowledged that the highest inspiration gave a man only very partial vision, that in speaking of religious things he himself could not always trust his own judgment, and that he was often like one groping in the dark. He was not certain of everything or of a great many things. There were many rooms in his house of faith into which the light had never shined; things mysterious, things doubtful, things open to question. We know in part, and we see through a glass, darkly. His customary language was, "We walk by faith and not by sight," but here and there he found rock from which nothing could move him, and declared as he does here, "*I know.*"

That word is not very impressive on some lips—occasionally it is very offensive. It is the announcement of infallible fools. It expresses the almighty confidence of ignorance and self-conceit. It serves instead of argument and reason. It is the word with which talkative bullies shout you down. When I hear a man say at every turn, with loud assertiveness, "I know," giving you to understand that there is no question in heaven or earth which he has not finally settled beyond discussion, I give that man a wide distance. It tries my Christian patience, and tempts my tongue to say wicked things. A Solomon of this kind is harder to endure than the vulgarest clown.

But the word on other lips has something of the sublime in it. When I hear the Lord Jesus Christ say, "We speak that we do know," I kneel down reverently to receive it, and respond with a glad amen; and when St Paul says in his quiet way, "I know," it produces in me a little of the same feeling, for he has learned that assurance from his Master. It was the language of humility, of long-tried experience, of convictions that had stood their ground unshaken for thirty years and more, though tried by every sort of storm and flood. It was not the brand-new certainty of a youth fresh from school, but the growth of half a lifetime, deep-rooted, immovably fixed. He was not surer of his own existence than he was sure that Christ died and rose again; that Christ had appeared to him; that Christ

was his living, loving Lord, ever present with him, mighty to help and able to keep all His promises. This was no dream, illusion, debatable opinion, or question that admitted of a doubt. There was no possibility of deception, and no room for misgiving. "I know whom I have believed."

# I.

**And now I want to remind you that a conviction of this kind is a source of strength and mastery, and that it is the one secret of a restful and happy life.**

You can see at a glance that it made St Paul. It made him the man he was. There is no doubt about that. It is the key to his life's story. It was the backbone behind his heart of flesh. It was the rock under his feet, the armour on his breast, the sword in his hand, and the light shining always before his eyes. It steadied him through all the tossings and shiftings of his course. It kept him calm amid the storms and stress and strife to which he was continually exposed. It sustained him with a mighty hope through all failure and disappointments. It equipped and inspired him for each day's work, and perhaps above all things it made him the most convincing and persuasive preacher that ever lived. Men could not resist that "*I know*" of his.

The enthusiasm of an impassioned, unfaltering

conviction is always mighty, and for the most part irresistible. It is like a fire kindled in a dry forest, it catches hold of everything. It is a contagion, a magnetic force, a spiritual mesmerism. Men cannot reason with it. It overpowers their objections, and compels their assent. Men believed Paul's witness, because they saw the light of certainty in his eyes, and heard the ring of absolute assurance in his voice. His work marched to the music of the words, "*we know.*" "I know whom I have believed."

My brethren, it is the things you know that fit you for life's work. It takes you a long time to find out what you can do, and to know a few things well. You begin perhaps by fancying that you can do fifty things equally well, and that your knowledge at all points is broad, deep, and sufficient. You discover by humiliating failures the vanity and delusiveness of all that. You learn that there are limitations to the powers of the cleverest man. You then put your hands to one or two things. You get to know them well. You become master there ; and you have found your post and sphere of duty, and there is your life's work done. It is better to know that I can break stones and do it, than merely to imagine I can be a poet, statesman, apostle ; and fool away my life in dreaming of things of which I have no more knowledge than a child. It is when you really know one thing that you begin to be of some count in the world.

It is always the things of which we are sure that give stability to our lives. There is no peace for a

man until he knows a few of his fellow-men so well that he can trust them heartily, wholly, and without a misgiving. I had rather have one friend whom I can implicitly swear by than a thousand in whose presence I am always on my guard. Life is not worth living unless a man believes in his wife, and a wife believes in her husband, almost as they believe in their God. Let me have just half-a-dozen men and women, if no more, whose honesty is beyond doubt, whose goodness I never suspect, and there is rock for my feet. The cynic tells you not to trust anybody. That is devil's doctrine, and the way to a miserable life. Far better to be occasionally betrayed and deceived than to carry a lurking suspicion wherever you go, and to see behind the truest and kindest eyes a possibility of guile. There is music and there is sunshine in my life when I have taken a few men into my heart and set them above doubt, when I can say, "I know whom I have believed."

## II.

**If you want to live a straight life, you must have certain principles of conduct settled and fixed—things which are like axioms to you, and which you never call in question.**

It is not necessary to believe and remember all the excellent moral precepts and wise proverbs which have been served up for guidance from

nursery days until now, but to have some half-a-dozen moral certainties on which you consistently and uniformly act. If you are only absolutely sure that two and two make four, you are some distance on the road to perfection. It is not so ridiculously easy as you think. A great many people believe that two and two make five, or that they even make nothing. They think that by paying one wrong back with another, they do not make two wrongs, but square the account and leave zero. They think that they can undo one lie by telling another, and that by adding a second sin to a first, they do not make two sins, but clear the score altogether. It is really only a good man who consistently believes that two and two make four. It is not only a good man, but a noble and grand man, who acts up on all occasions to the simple principles that honesty is the best policy ; that to speak the truth is right, wise, and beautiful ; that to forgive an injury is divine. These things are as certain as that two and two make four. Yet we are continually backing out of them when they are inconvenient, and unconsciously calling them in question in some of the everyday matters of life. You will not go far wrong if you can only say of these elementary things : " They are almighty certainties ; I know what I have believed. "

## III.

**You want a few things in your religion which  
are like rock.**

Not a host of articles, doctrines, propositions, and opinions, but one or two truths which you would hold at the cost of half your fortune, or at the cost of life, if it came to that. It is better on certain occasions to have one square foot of solid ground than square miles of water and quicksands. The religious life is not made by an elaborate creed. It is made by a few beautiful and unwavering assurances. It is not necessary to subscribe to thirty-nine articles. Official machines and imitative parrots can do that. What is necessary, is to set your seal to this, that God is true, and Jesus, and hold to it as you hold to your very existence. You tell me that you believe the whole of the Bible. Very well! I congratulate you; but I would rather know that you believe any one bit of it with the same unwavering confidence with which you believe in your wife, or in the shining of the sun, or in your own heart-beats. It is because we are not absolutely sure of anything, that our religious life halts and stumbles, and we never reach the peace of God which passeth all understanding, or enter into the joy of our Lord. You hope that these things may be true. There are times when you believe them as strongly as you believe anything which is

unproved and out of sight ; but often they float before you only as lovely perchances and possibilities, and you merely touch them without grasping them.

How many of us are so rooted and grounded in the assurance that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, that we never once waver from it? How many of us are there who believe without the shadow of a doubt that God rules upon this earth, and carries forward His good unerring purpose through all the sins, horrors, and confusions which make the earth groan and the heart of man despair? How many of us have faith enough to believe, at *all* times, that our own lives are in His hands, that His eyes are upon our struggles, and His ears open to our prayers? How many of us are sure of His final judgment, of His changeless love, of His eternal pity and forgiveness? How many of us, even in those gloomy hours when bereavement comes, hold, without the least faltering or trembling, the mighty victorious conviction that there is a life beyond, and that away on the other side of the darkness there is the rising light of the eternal day? We trust, we hope, we believe ; yet even in the belief the heart shakes and trembles and falls down before the pitying Master, saying, " Help Thou my unbelief." It is our doubts that make us feeble. The many lights in our hearts are flickering and unsteady ; we want a few or even one that will burn clearly always. That makes the strength and joyousness of the godly life ; to bind ourselves fast

to a few simple things, to cling to them as a man clings to bare life, and to say, "I know what I have believed."

#### IV.

**And verily that one bit of knowledge and confidence, which St Paul humbly and reverently boasted of here, is worth all the rest.**

It includes all the rest. I know *whom* I have believed. Not a thousand doctrines, but one *Person*; that was all he needed. That is all we need. We can almost do without every other certainty if we have only this certainty. There are hours when a man distrusts everything and everybody, terrible hours; yet even then he will be saved from despair and moral suicide if he only turns to the Man of Nazareth and Calvary and says there is truth in Him: He never deceived any one, He never will deceive. There are times when every other hope is shattered, when disappointment meets us in the very path where we have walked and laboured with most confidence, when the dearest affections on which we have leaned are broken. Even then our world will have sunshine in it and promise, if in the thick darkness our eyes still see the face of the Son of God. Believe that whatever He did was right, and that whatever He said was true; that in Him there was no spot of sin or possibility of error. Believe that when He spoke of God and truth, and love

and forgiveness, and immortality and the world to come, when He claimed Divine power and masterhood, He knew what He was saying, and had almighty and unerring right to say it. Believe that all His great and precious promises were made with perfect foresight, and that He is ever able to fulfil them. Believe that in His hands are the destinies of this poor world which He came to save, and that your own lives are to be kept, and tried, judged, and rewarded by His loving power.

Then nothing can shake you. There are no sands here, no tossing sea of changes, no shifting, flickering lights, no variableness nor shadow of turning. There is an everlasting throne, there is a hiding-place from the storm, a covert from the tempest, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. "I *know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

GOD IS LOVE

By ROBERT P. DOWNES, LL.D.



## GOD IS LOVE

“God is love.”—I JOHN iv. 8.

HERE we have an ocean of thought in a drop of language. It were worth a man's while, though he were the greatest of his race, to have come into the world, uttered these words, and then gone forth again into the eternal silence. The reason for his existence would have been amply demonstrated.

“God is Love!” This is a revelation of vast significance. Rightly considered, it determines the well-being of the universe and the destiny of our race. Whether we are the sport of a pitiless and cruel fate, or are under the providence of a Divine Father; whether we are merely as leaves driven to and fro by the heedless winds, or children beloved and guarded; whether death and darkness are the final goal of our brief existence, or whether we are moving on toward life and light eternal: all this depends upon the truth or falsehood of the revelation of our text. Those who lightly esteem it are blind, and cannot see afar off; and those who deny it, unsustained by overwhelming evidence of its untruth,

stand among the bitterest enemies of their fellow-men.

“God is Love!” This is His essential nature, and includes all other attributes. This is the ocean, call the bays and estuaries what you will. You speak of the German Ocean, and the English Channel, and the Irish Sea—but it is all one sea. So you speak of Sanctity, and Justice, and Righteousness, and Truth—but it is all one sea, and the name of that sea is Love. Separate perfections in God are as the colours in the rainbow, but the pure, white light in which all these colours are blended is Love. His wisdom is the intelligence of His love; his omnipotence is the might of His love; His righteousness is the integrity of His love; his sanctity is the purity of His love; His threatenings are the warnings of His love—the voice of His tenderness saying to His creatures, “Do yourselves no harm.”

“God is Love!” This is the central and supreme revelation of the Divine character. This is the key-stone of theology. Whatever is inconsistent with this statement, however loudly asserted, must be set aside as erroneous and untrue. This is “the law and the testimony” to which every other witness concerning the Deity must conform. “If they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.”

“God is Love!” This is the revelation which will finally explain all the dark mysteries of nature, providence, and redemption, and which will be the theme of the universal song when “every creature

which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth," is heard saying: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever" (Rev. v. 13).

"God is Love!" This statement deals not only with the character, but with the very existence of God. It is the affirmation which tests and establishes His right to be called God. If you deny the love and the perfection of God, you practically annihilate Him. He is either the Perfect One, compelling by His essential loveliness the homage and adoration of His creatures, or He is nothing. God either means *good*, or He is no longer God. As Browning says:

"The loving worm within its clod  
Were diviner than a loveless God  
Amid His worlds."

This is not presumption, but the loftiest truth. The benevolence and the existence of God stand or fall together. If God could be proved to be imperfect, to be something less than the creature, then that proof would dethrone Him, and there would be no longer a being whom we could call God.

*How is the statement of our text attested?*

## I.

**By the beauty, the bounty, and the beneficence of  
the Creation which we see above us and  
around us.**

The whole creation floats in the ocean of God's almighty love. It was love which called it into being, and which sustains it moment by moment. But for the love of a Creator who desired to give life and happiness to creatures apart from Himself, it would never have existed; and did that celestial fire cease to burn, it would vanish into nothingness. "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." Look at the heavens above you, breaking up into a sublime and mysterious infinity with its multitudinous worlds scattered like dust throughout its illimitable vastness. It was love which called them into being and which sustains them in their ordered grandeur. How delicate their adjustments, how marvellous the reciprocal influence of their relative masses, how astounding the laws of their motion and the silent energy which keeps them all in leash! Truly "the heavens declare the glory of God." Theism abides, evolution notwithstanding.

"Our hearts are thrilled within us when we think  
Of the great miracle which still goes on  
In silence round us—the perpetual work  
Of His creation, finished, yet renewed  
For ever."

Look at the earth beneath you, with "its passings to and fro of fruitful shower and grateful shade, its visions of silver palaces built about the horizon," its pomp of summer woodlands, its wealth of golden harvests, its hum of happy insects, its warble of rejoicing birds, its lambs sporting in the meadows, its meek-eyed cattle browsing in the valley, its fish leaping from the tarn or darting through the ocean. It was love which rolled it into space, robed it with loveliness, and bade it sing aloud for joy. But the objector says: "Is there not also pain and seeming cruelty in nature?" Yes! we frankly admit that pain and seeming cruelty do appear in the struggle for existence and the evolution of things. But will the pain compare for a moment with the abounding gladness? A few birds may be dying in the darkness of the forest, but the spring-grove is ringing with rapture. The general joy is immensely greater than the pain. Furthermore, our observation teaches us that if there is a process of mutual *war* in nature, the result of the struggle for existence, there is also a law of mutual *help* in nature, and if it is more or less true that all things live *on* each other, it is also true that all things live *for* each other.

If it be urged that there are earthquakes and volcanoes in the system of nature, we reply that these are but the safety-valves of the world, that the world is wide, and that man is gifted with sufficient intelligence to preserve him from building his homes on the slopes of Mont Pelée, or under the shadow of

Vesuvius. Remove the miseries which arise from preventible causes, causes which man himself may control, and it is not difficult to affirm in our outlook on creation that "God is love."

## II.

**The affirmation of our text is further attested by the diviner elements in man as a creature made after the Divine likeness.**

The highest thing in nature is human nature, and it is here we look for further proof that God is love than is found in the lower order of things. Despite the sin and folly of man, there is still a grandeur about him which attests his Divine origin. Although the image of God in him is defaced and dimmed, it is not obliterated. In certain crises of his history we find outbursts of love, and nobleness, and self-sacrifice, which inspire in us a wonder not unmingled with awe. It is then that the image of God stands out in him. That young Cornish miner who, when the last place was offered him in the cage, stood back and said: "Save my mate here, for he has a wife and children," and himself perished in the fire-damp. That stewardess of the *Stella* who, when the steamer was sinking off the Channel Islands, gave out all the life-belts to the affrighted women under her charge, and sank herself into the surging sea. That pilot of the Mississippi dying at his post at the helm of the burning steamer which he was guiding to the shore.

That Russian servant who cast himself from the sledge into the midst of the ravening wolves to save his master and mistress from their fangs. That poor child dying in the New York slum with the pathetic words on her pale lips : " I am glad I am going to die, for when I am gone my brothers and sisters will have enough to eat." That outcast mother in the wild winter night wrapping her scanty dress and shawl round her infant, and willingly perishing to preserve its life.

Who will attempt to fathom the heart of motherhood—a mother's pity—a mother's forgiveness—a mother's self-sacrifice ?

The lines of Rudyard Kipling are appropriate here :

" If I were hanged on the highest hill,  
I know whose love would follow me still ;  
If I were drowned in the deepest sea,  
I know whose tears would come down to me ;  
If I were damned in body and soul,  
I know whose prayers would make me whole ;  
Mother o' mine, mother o' mine."

And what is this unquenchable love of motherhood but the impress of the Divine—a mark of our celestial lineage—the faint echo of

" A love which rises infinite degrees  
Above the tenderness of human hearts ? "

Why should we hesitate to judge God by what is divinest in ourselves ? He did not so hesitate who said : " If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts

unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matthew vii. 11).

### III.

**The affirmation of our text is yet further attested  
by the life and death of Jesus Christ.**

It was not in the arena of nature or through the study of what is noblest in man that St John learnt the secret of our text. It was given him as he leaned on the bosom of Christ and felt the beating of the very heart of God tabernacled in our clay. Christ came into our world to unveil the heart of God. He said: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Christ was not a personality standing apart from God—God standing on the side of justice, and Christ standing on the side of mercy. Christ did not come into the world to make God love us: it was because God loved us that He came. Christ has not somehow softened God and made Him kinder; He has simply interpreted for us the nature of God.

"Thus," as Browning writes:

" . . . the All-Great is the All-loving too,  
Thus through the thunder comes a human voice,  
Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here.'"

Christ interprets for us the nature of a God who

suffers Himself rather than inflict suffering on others—who uses His strength to uplift the weak, and restore the wandering, and cleanse the polluted—whose glory and joy is not that He can mould worlds and hurl them into space, but that He can bless human hearts and kindle in them fires of gladness which will never die.

Such is the love of God revealed in the work of human redemption that He stands in His own light. It appears incredible, and men hesitate to accept it as true. But we have been redeemed because God is love. This and this alone explains the mystery. There was a wealth of grand theology in the reply of an old negro woman to one who said it was inconceivable that God should so regard our human world. “Ah!” she replied, “it is just like Him!” Yes! it is just like Him, because He is love. There is that in the Divine nature and administration which mercifully adapts itself to our sinfulness and frailty. Pitying human weakness, grieving over human sin, condoling with human sorrow, God has set Himself toward us in the beautiful relations of Father—Saviour—Comforter.

Love must utter itself, and Divine love has trod our earth in Jesus Christ, pitying human sorrow, commiserating human weakness, dying for human sin. “He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.” It was *love* which led Him to wear our earth about Him, share our sorrows, weep with our tears, and

"bear our sins in His own body on the tree." It was *love* which led Him to enter for us the dark and noisome sepulchre, which until then appeared to be the goal of human life, and to break through it a pathway into glory. It was *love* which, while His body rested in the tomb, led His spirit into Hades—the kingdom of departed souls—with a message of mercy on His lips for those "spirits in prison," the hapless antediluvians who were visited with such swift destruction in the days of Noah. It is *love* which with unwearied patience collects one by one the stray sheep in the wilderness until they swell into "a great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue." It is *love* which has seated Him on the Mediatorial Throne to pursue the great work of Redemption both on earth and in the Intermediate State until the last great day, when He shall deliver up His Mediatorial Kingdom to the Father, and "God shall be all in all."

"Yes ! one unquestioned text we read,  
All doubt beyond, all fear above ;  
Nor crackling pile, nor cursing creed,  
Can burn or blot it—*God is Love.*"

## IV.

**Arguing in favour of our text, there are certain important considerations pressed upon us which we cannot evade.**

I. The first of these is the question, "*If God is love, why then the presence in our world of sin and misery?*"

To this we reply that there were two things possible in relation to our world, namely, that God should create men un-free, and therefore incapable of virtue; or free, and therefore liable to sin. He has chosen the latter course, and the final result will vindicate His wisdom and benevolence. God has conferred on man, as a rational creature, that grand yet awful prerogative of liberty which at once renders him capable of virtue, and free to love and serve his beneficent Creator. Rightly considered, human liberty is a mark of God's hunger for the free love of His creatures. He desires them to be sons and not slaves, and has therefore made them free to obey or disobey. They have broken away from God and virtue, and hence the misery and sorrow of the world. Misery is not of God's ordination, but is the result of man's abuse of the sacred gift of liberty. Men are continually blaming God for that which is their own work. The fact of world-suffering is a dark problem, but there is a fact which comes before suffering, and that is sin,

or, in other words, the persistent choice of evil under light. As knowledge increases we hesitate more and more to say of any misfortune or privation, "It is the act of God." Nine-tenths of the misery of the world is man's work. The remaining tenth would mean beneficence, if we only understood it. If men only studied the laws of God and obeyed them, most of the ills of life would vanish. As Burns expresses it :

"Man's inhumanity to man,  
Makes countless thousands mourn."

War is the result of human passion and ambition. The degradation of woman is man's work. Poverty, tragic poverty, is no divine institution, but the result of human selfishness. Take out of man's life the sorrow that comes to him from his own sin, and there would not be much left to mourn over. We are in a very large degree our own fates, and our own deeds are our doomsmen. Maurice Maeterlinck, no special pleader, but a far-seeing thinker, admits that the three great scourges—poverty, disease, and mental weakness—are of human origin, and not due to Nature, and says that "the relic of mystery will very nigh go into the hollow of the philosopher's hand." Furthermore, with regard to the sorrow which exists, we find that the love of God has intervened to turn the curse into a blessing. Sorrow is a process in the Divine order which will amply justify itself by its fruits in the final issue of

events. There is another world than this for which God is moulding men, and sorrow is a most essential process for the perfecting of the soul. Which of us as individuals would like to eliminate from our life all the passages and workings of its sorrow? And what is true of the individual is true of the race. Sorrow in this life, and under present conditions, is a hallowed thing — a ministering angel if an angel veiled. We have been redeemed by sorrow. "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

"Behold mankind beneath God's pestle ground,  
That Stone of Sorrow, bruising flesh and soul ;  
Age-long their blood outpours, their groans resound—  
Ask ye of God—' What ending to this dole ?'

"Thus saith He, ' I prepare for coming years,  
Love without lust, and Passion without taint ;  
What man is joyous who is strange to tears ?  
What man is virtuous but the tempted saint ?'"

If it behoved the All-wise "to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through suffering," suffering must have blessed issues with regard to those for whom that salvation was won in the Garden and on the Cross. Nay, the story of the ages and the history of human progress demonstrate that it is so. "Not to have discerned," says one, "the relation of sorrow to virtue, is the leading defect pervading all the Greek moral philosophy."

2. There is yet another solemn question which thrusts itself upon us in its relation to our text, and

that is *the question concerning the future destiny of man.*

The commonly received idea that only those are finally saved who enter in this present life into an experience of pardon and purity of heart and life, cannot be made to agree with the conception of God as essential love. This a problem which must be faced by the Christian thinkers of our time. The theology of the past has chiefly concerned itself with the task of crystallising the contents of the Bible into dogma and creeds. The theology of the future must concern itself chiefly with the effort to reconcile the dark and difficult passages both of Scripture and of human history with the central revelation of our text. Apart altogether from the consideration of the numberless millions of the race who have passed in a depraved condition into the unseen world, who never heard of Christ and His salvation, we have to deal with millions in the present day who have had no sufficient probation or opportunity on which to base the solemn and awful issues of an everlasting destiny. Tens of thousands around us are yearly spawned into an environment in which purity and virtue cannot breathe. "Drunkards from the breast, harlots from the cradle, damned before they're born," says the Radical tailor in Kingsley's *Alton Locke*. We are accustomed to call them "fallen," but God knows they have never stood. Humanly speaking, they have never had a chance in this life. But if there

is love and justice in the universe, they must have a chance hereafter. Otherwise their consignment to eternal perdition would make the words of our text a mockery and

“Cast a shadow on the throne of God,  
And darken heaven.”

Otherwise we should be inclined to accept the dictum of a German sceptic, that “the great enemy to be destroyed is man’s belief in immortality.”

Where, then, is our way of escape from a condition of either hopeless pessimism, blank atheism, or dark despair? Do the waves of hell indeed beat on a “living shore heaped with the damned like pebbles?” In the vast and solemn field of human destinies is Satan the harvester and God the gleaner? Is the great Divine Redemption with which the Gospel is charged—the Redemption which proclaims the message of God’s love to all mankind—the Redemption by which God has reconciled the world to Himself—the Redemption which, if it has any meaning at all, relates to the everlasting—is this Redemption an infinite and solemn failure? Fearlessly and for the glory of God, we answer—“No! a thousand times No!” What, then, is our conclusion? We are shut up to the conviction which is demanded by reason, and for which there is far greater support in Holy Scripture than is generally supposed, that the saving work of Christ is not limited to the present life, but is continued in Hades

—in the intermediate state over which He is Lord—and will be prolonged until the Day of final Judgment.

On the supposition that death is the vanishing point of the Mediatorial empire, the superstructure of Redemption would be unworthy of its foundation, and the Divine economy would not be adapted to human duration, or to the weight of human destiny. Either the Gospel, which is God's message of hope and deliverance for universal man, must appeal to universal man, and that under conditions which render an adequate response possible, or its costly provisions are all but impotent, and the hopes of the sinful human race are built on stubble. Do what you will and you cannot limit the message of redeeming mercy to this life, or you stultify it altogether. You make the love of God and the Cross of Christ of none effect. Some provision beyond the grave there must be for the knowledge of saving truth, and for the renovation of human souls, or you clothe the Eternal God with failure, refuse to the atoning Christ the satisfaction which is due to "the travail of His soul," fill all heaven with sad amazement, and kindle triumphant laughter in the deeps of hell.

But "God is love," and because He is love we hold, not merely on the ground of our own spiritual instincts, but on the witness also of Holy Scripture, that this provision is made. There is, indeed, but one limit to the redeeming power of the love of God in Christ—the limit of a will which, fixed in the

love and choice of evil, persistently and under light rejects the Divine. So we believe, and, so believing, write :

“ Not for this fleeting life alone,  
O Power Divine, we look to Thee ;  
Thou never canst Thy work disown,  
In time or in eternity.  
All finite love may droop and fail,  
Set to the fashion of the hour ;  
But Thine must evermore prevail,  
Changeless in pity as in power.  
No soul is lost by Thy decree,  
But only through its scorn of Thee ! ”



THE DESIRE OF GOD AND MAN

By JAMES MOFFATT, D.D.



## THE DESIRE OF GOD AND MAN

“And He made as though He would have gone further. But they constrained Him.”—LUKE xxiv. 28, 29.

“HE made as though He would have gone further?” Then did He not care to be with them? Had He no warm and close interest in these two disciples, with their loyal hearts and puzzled heads? Was He going to pass from them in a casual and indifferent fashion, leaving them to their own resources? Or if—as was really the case—He desired to enter their home, why did He not simply do so without further question? Why did He appear, as it were, reluctant, and need to be pressed? Was not His own desire, we may ask, enough of itself to bring Him into their company?

No, it was not. More was needed to complete their fellowship. Hitherto, they had enjoyed His companionship on the road without asking; He had travelled thus far with them unsought, and all they had had to do was to accept His company. But now something higher and more definite was required. To have Him as their guest, no longer a wayfarer but an intimate friend—this called for a choice or

movement of the heart; for He neither would nor could enter where He was not welcomed and desired. They "constrained Him"; that is, they eagerly pressed Him to remain, and He agreed.

# I.

**Now, the bearing of this upon God's relation to men is both vital and evident. His great and constant aim is to have men in communion with Himself, or to dwell in their inmost heart and spirit.**

Through the Spirit of Jesus, God comes near to our life, commending His own life to us by proofs of love and mercy and power that are almost irresistible. In His providence He approaches us, rousing our interest, stirring vague hopes and cravings, and throwing round us an indefinable atmosphere of affection, in order to put us into some sort of tune and touch with Himself. And yet, that is not enough! True and wise and tender as are God's appeals to us, they need something more. His choice and approach do not of themselves carry Him to the throne and centre of our beings. No, they require for their perfect issue one thing, and that is our consent, our desire. The full and satisfying revelation of God in Jesus is not for the indifferent or even for the good-natured, but for those who urgently want it; His best gifts—and He Himself is His best gift—are bestowed on nothing short of

prayer, earnest longing, and definite desire. To come, Christ must be welcomed. For it is one thing to have Christ near us on the way, to be with Him in a vague sense, as we all are, going through our life. That, after all, demands little from our hearts. But it is quite another thing to have Him admitted to the secrets and sources of our being.

## II.

### **That cannot be without a strong desire on our part.**

It is an experience reserved for those who feel that, whatever comes and whoever goes, they must have this Jesus to be theirs, since life is incomplete and unsafe until He comes. They cannot bear to think of living and working now without His presence. While their minds may not understand all His sacrifice and purpose, and while His influence on them may be, like all influence, wider than their consciousness, they have their hearts set on Himself.

1. *This truth is vividly illustrated by the way in which some people grow up in early life.* During childhood and youth, Christ is in their lives pretty much as He was in the lives of these two disciples on their walk, present but neither fully understood nor definitely sought. For He is not outside the world before it realises Him. He has access to the lives even of those who think little or nothing about Him,

and He possesses ways of visiting and controlling and directing them unasked. Most of us grow up into a sort of life where we are only half-conscious of God's presence. Reared amid associations of religion, and trained to think of God in some fashion by precept and example, many young people preserve up to a certain point an interest in Him. They could hardly tell you why or how, but God touches them in a vague, indistinct manner, and they feel sometimes strangely drawn to the work and history of Christ as that meets them in the Bible or in the religious features of their age. If religion is not positively welcomed, at anyrate it is not violently rejected. Upon the contrary, there is in many cases an incipient leaning to it, which insensibly moulds the character; for no one accustomed to distinguish between the tides and the froth on the surface will hesitate to admit the presence of much more latent religious feeling in young people than they often are credited with, or than they themselves may be conscious of.

For some years this goes on, and then the break comes. Such vague relations are only preliminary. They do not meet the full needs of the heart, nor can they satisfy the hopes of God. The time comes, when we pass into manhood and womanhood, to discover that we have powers of choice and affection, and that henceforth we must be responsible for what we admit into life or exclude from it. This is the level of maturity. It forms the moulding sphere of

our personalities, and inevitably we learn that our religion shares in this newer responsibility, and that if God is to be a power and reality to us He must be definitely chosen. Our convictions must be personally verified. We must make our own what up till now has been largely a matter of association or tradition. For, while religion is more or less brought to us in the earlier stages of life, we are bound, as we grow up, to lay hold of it with mind and heart, if it is to remain ours at all. There is no drift into a mature faith. To possess God, you must be more than willing—acquiescence no longer suffices. You must now passionately and humbly and resolutely determine to have Christ at any cost.

2. *The same truth lies at the threshold of each renewed experience of God.* To pass from the lower to the higher, to admit God more fully into our beings, always means more desire, more conscious and distinct desire; and wherever this is lacking, He must remain more or less upon the outside. Often we have to deplore the feelings of distance and coldness that seem to possess our lives.

“This freezing heart, O Lord, this will  
 Dry as the desert sand;  
 Good thoughts that will not come, bad thoughts  
 That come without command.  
 A faith that seems not faith, a hope  
 That cares not for its aim,  
 A love that none the hotter grows  
 At thy most blessed name.”

It looks as if God were near us, and yet not near enough to be our intimate Friend ; as though Christ, for all His love, were not inside, as perhaps once He was, touching and sustaining the soul. There is something we can hardly explain. It is not exactly doubt or sin, yet our relations with God are not face to face, hearty and free and loving. As a rule, the failure lies in desire. Let us question ourselves. Do we dread life apart from Him? Would it make much practical difference to us if we heard that Jesus had never risen? Have we not failed recently to urge God? Have we ever prayed with all our heart and soul for God's presence? Have we let Him see that our love for Him is something far deeper than words or forms, and that we are not satisfied with an outward appearance of religion, or with such dim aspirations and vague thoughts as His providence may stir in us from time to time? If not, how can God be at home with us? Unless we care, and show Him that we care, supremely for Himself, how are we ever to know how deeply He cares for us? For nothing surely is further from God's heart than the life which accepts Him as a matter of course, without any thrill, without any output of desire and eager longing in return. And no step in religion is more fruitful than that from indifference to interest. We seldom go so high or so far as when we cease to repeat or believe a truth on the report of others, and start, for ourselves and by ourselves, to make it our very own. It is as we constrain Him who is the

Truth, that He goes in, and we find that He is life indeed.

### III.

**All advances, then, in our life with God may be summed up in this response of desire to desire.**

Its leading method is prayer, definite prayer rising from a heart that cannot rest until it has opened its every chamber and secret to His spirit. Vague wishes will not accomplish this communion. A dim and easy connection with God will not produce it. No amount of mere willingness to think and talk of religion in an amiable non-committal way, will ever suffice. These, we may be sure, have no hold upon Christ, since they fail to express the real heart of the man, or to expose his inner self. They do not draw God to themselves; they possess little or no attraction for One whose heart is brimming with a love that craves for love in return. Love and prayer alone, these are what bring Christ to themselves. He desires to be desired; and the one thing in human life that God never passes, the one call that brings Him to its aid, is the prayer of a soul that has learned how poor and lonely the best life must be if Christ remains a stranger to it. "They constrained Him, and He went in." How much we need to experience that glow and output of the heart! It is not that we feel

we deserve God to be ours, or that He ought to come and relieve us. Rather, what urges us is the thought that without Christ we cannot face the darkness. When we desire Him, it means that we humbly and sincerely admit, in our hopes and difficulties, that He has at last become necessary to our safety and peace. Apart from His inspiration and presence, we feel that life is almost intolerable. Here it is, at this burning point of conviction, that God can enter our very souls. He is known really as He is needed. He is possessed just as He is desired. He is won as He is sought. The single irresistible claim we can make upon Him is that of a sincere desire to know Him and to love Him better.

And it is a claim He is very swift to satisfy. We are told, indeed, that these disciples "constrained Him," but I need not remind you that this implies no manner of reluctance or unwillingness on His part. By prayer and desire we do not force God to come to us. It is already His purpose and His own desire to enter our souls. That is the whole reason of His appeal and approach. He had already drawn near to those two disciples on that day for the express purpose of revealing Himself to them, and now, as then, prayer is no more than a co-operation in His aims, which helps to satisfy and realise His heart's desire. He "made," indeed, "as though He would have gone further," but that was simply to elicit the real spirit of the men. The

entire object of His intercourse with them was to enter their inmost hearts, but He veiled His own desire for a moment in order to quicken their desire, knowing that His approach was impossible unless and until the depth of His love had found some corresponding echo within theirs. Our desire is the condition, not the cause, of His. In our religious experience, whether we are conscious of it or not, the initiative is ever upon His side; our longings for Him do not awaken His longing for us, but are the outcome of it. "Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them." That is the beginning of it all, even though our eyes are sometimes blind to Him at first, and though He seems for a while reluctant to come in and abide with us.

#### IV.

**This is not the sole instance of Christ's method.**

Twice at least He had already, in His ministry, used it to quicken the human passion for Himself. Once He approached His disciples as they tossed in the cold and darkness of the storm upon the lake; never were they more in need of Him, we should have said, and yet "He would have passed by them," till their faith sprang up to energy and the cry of genuine need brought Him in a moment to their side. Once again, in dealing with the Syro-Phœnician mother, He seemed at the outset to care

little for her prayer or for her daughter. Apparently, He put her off. Then, raising her faith to a noble pitch of confidence, He satisfied her heart and so satisfied Himself. In these cases and in this, the same principle obtains. It is God's end to evoke desire, and to make us therefore realise that He must be chosen and coveted, and that it must be Christ or nothing. For our own sakes, He would bring us to this sharp point of need. But once it is reached, once He is sure of our earnest and sincere desire, then He gives all, and immediately. He puts Himself within reach of our need and prayer, such is the glory of His love. For surely the greater love is, the more it obeys. Genuine affection responds to any true call or claim from those whom it seeks to reach. Even in our human relationships we know the power one life exercises over another: how weakness claims help from strength, and how strength responds: how in our ties of love and friendship the more we love, the more we admit the right of others to constrain us. So is it with love in God. Our loneliness and ignorance and sorrow bring Jesus still to our side, as we confess them. In His eternal, unsparing love, He cannot resist our appeal or remain deaf to our cry. Such power we have in prayer! Past prayer, past the humble and almost desperate confidence of need, He cannot go. As He is our Redeemer, He will never leave unfilled the love which He has once awakened, or the need that He—and He alone—avails to satisfy.

Bewildered, confused, or it may be preoccupied, we are going along, when He overtakes us, thinking perhaps of nothing so little as of meeting Him. And it is only by a slow process that He can raise sometimes our interest. Yet He goes with us, in all the wise patience of love, though we do not realise it, softening our prejudices, showing us how unreasonable are our doubts, and stirring uneasy questionings, until at last we come to be no longer contented with life as it is.

## V.

**All that preparation is the work of a living  
God who is familiar with our way.**

He can, and He does, touch the springs of our devotion and wonder, until they well up in a rush of affection and interest. For desire in us needs to be stirred. It needs to be nourished, by a delicate discipline of the mind and the heart. It does not come readily or all at once; to evoke it, time and great patience and wise handling are required. And how faithfully God bestows these upon us! Ere ever we are conscious of His presence or realise anything like the true value of His grace, He is touching us secretly again and again, even in our dull and careless hours. Of ourselves, we cannot work up true desire. We cannot excite ourselves into genuine love, for that comes only through the working of Christ's Spirit upon our minds and hearts, as we are moved to remember His death and love, His pro-

vidences in our own lives, His patience with our waywardness, and His pity for our weaknesses. Desire in us is only stirred by the sight and experience of the living object of desire, even Jesus, who suffered by the will of God for men, and who lives to bring them the red, ripe fruits of His great sacrifice.

Here, then, is our open secret of religious communion. As God is a living Spirit, He invests us with a power that actually "constrains" Him, a persuasive power that lies within reach of the lowest and humblest, the power of true desire. Few can speculate upon His being, and not all are able to display conspicuous heroism in His service. Most people are, like these two disciples, anonymous and obscure. But anyone can wish who has a human heart, a will and mind of his own. And to desire God is to have God. He gives Himself simply and at once to your heartfelt prayer and need. Though you may not know all that your life with Him will involve, cry to Him to remain with you, despite your past mistakes, and in face of the coming darkness. Cry to Him, for that cry shows your true heart, as nothing else can do; and once your heart is thus fully open, He can reveal to you the close and inner secrets of His own waiting and generous love. His desire is to be desired. And as you desire Him, so you possess Him.

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